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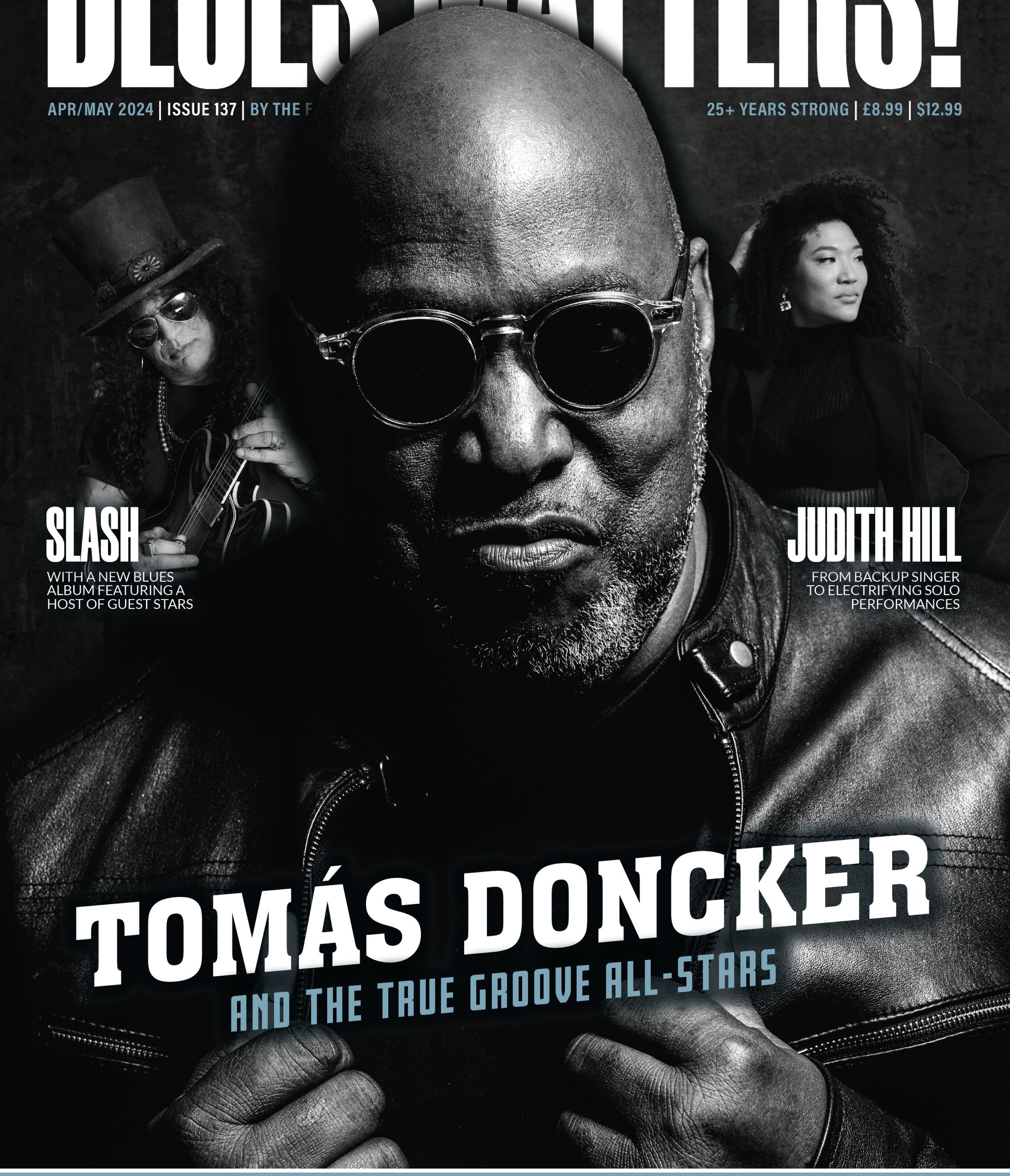

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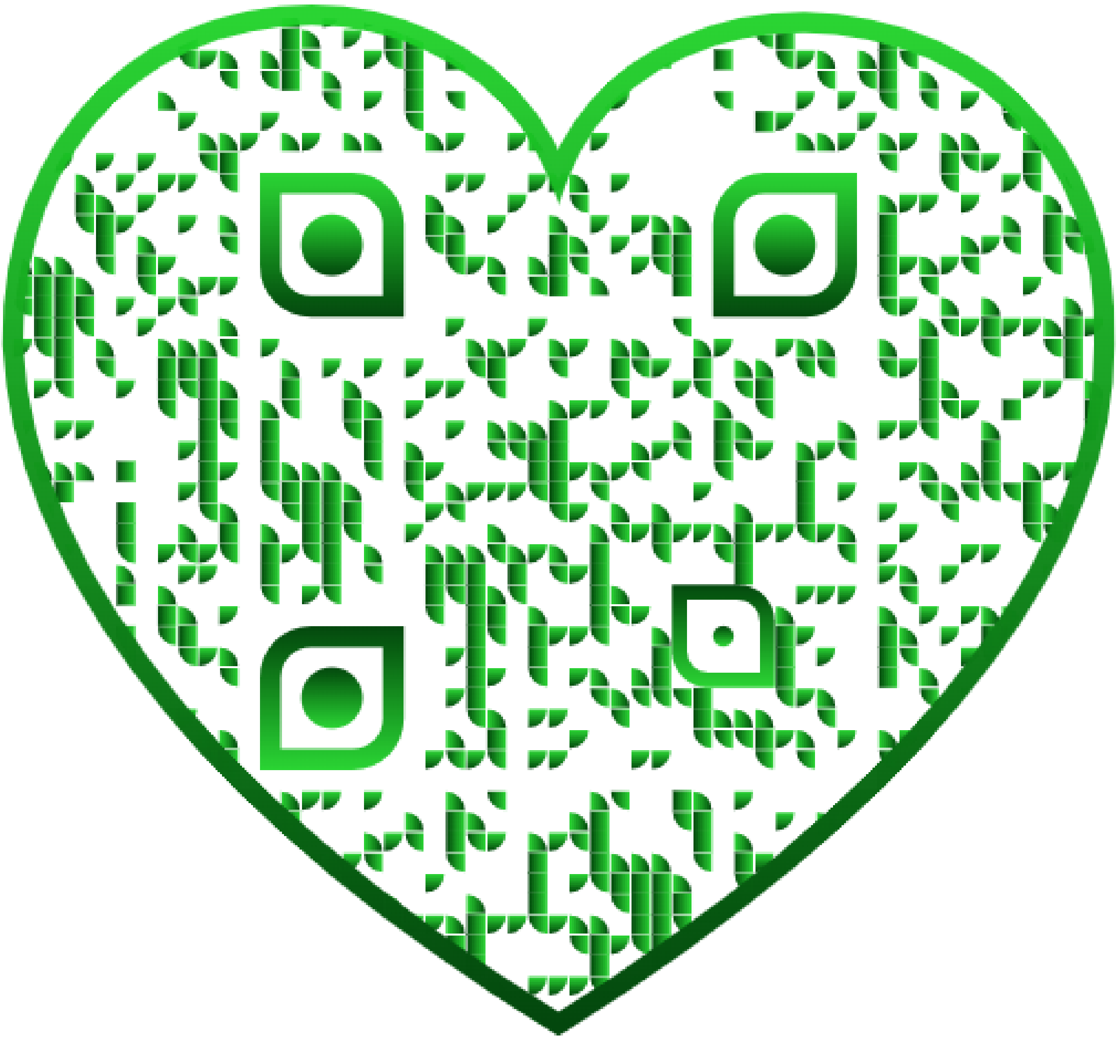

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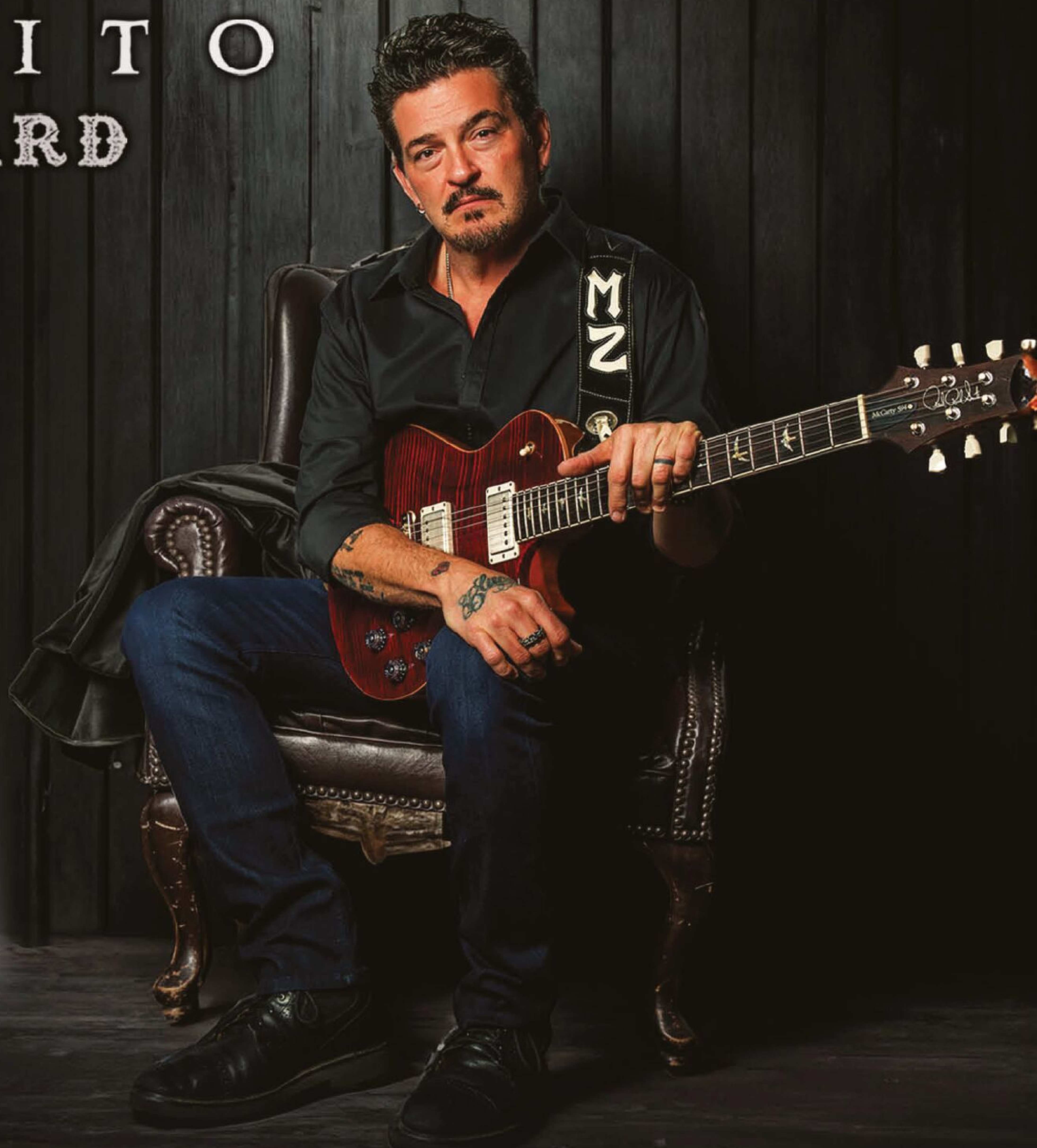

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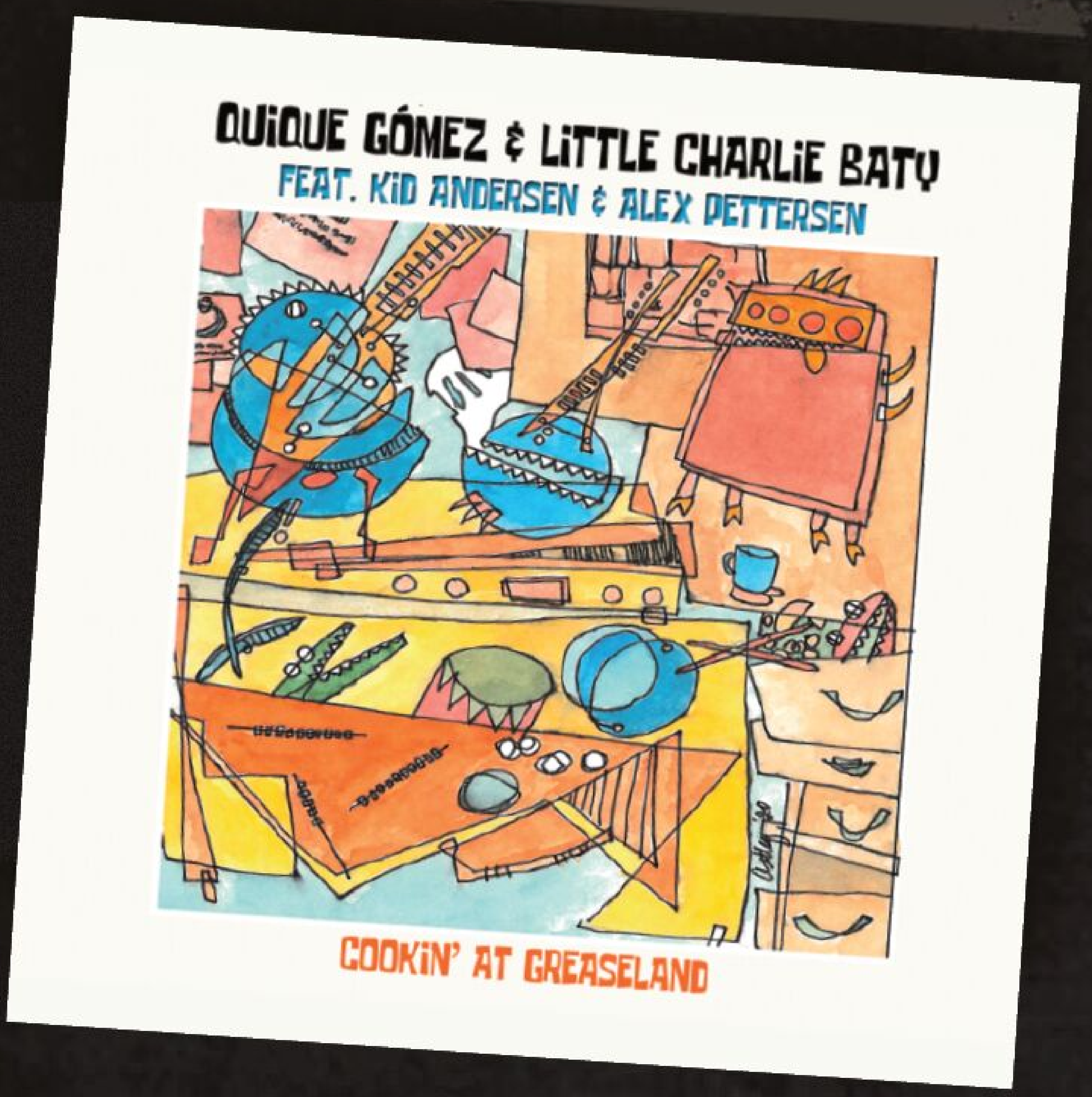

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PO Box 4820, STOKE ON TRENT, ST3 4PU

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF/OWNER:
Iain Patience:
editor@bluesmatters.com

ALBUM REVIEW EDITOR/OWNER:
Stephen Harrison:
reviews@bluesmatters.com

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES:
ads@bluesmatters.com

DESIGN & WEBSITE MANAGER:
design@bluesmatters.com

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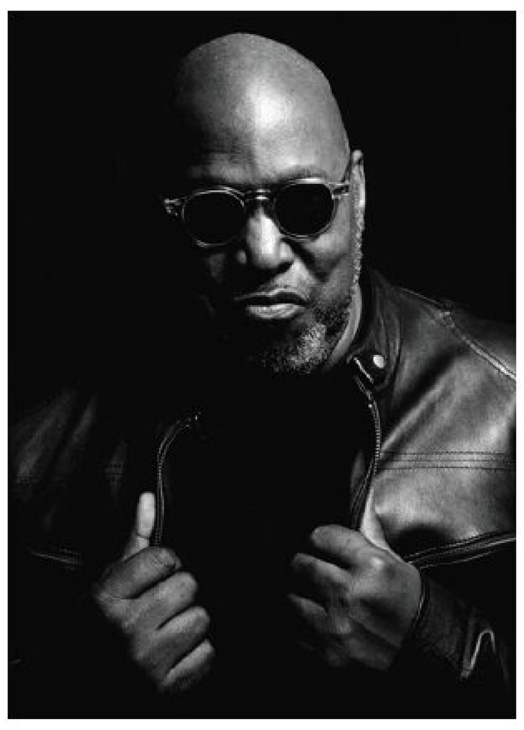

Cover image by
ROB BLACKHAM

Contributing Writers:

John Angus
Roy Bainton
Adrian Blacklee
Colin Campbell
Laura Carbone
Norman Darwen
Paul Davies
Dave Drury
Stephen Harrison
Barry Hopwood
Andy Hughes
Rowland Jones
Adam Kennedy
Jean Knappitt
Brian Kramer
Ben McNair
John Mitchell
David Osler
Iain Patience
Glenn Sargeant
Graeme Scott
Andy Snipper
Dani Wilde
Steve Yourglivch

Contributing Photographers:

Arnie Goodman
Adam Kennedy
Laura Carbone
Rob Blackham
plus others credited on page.

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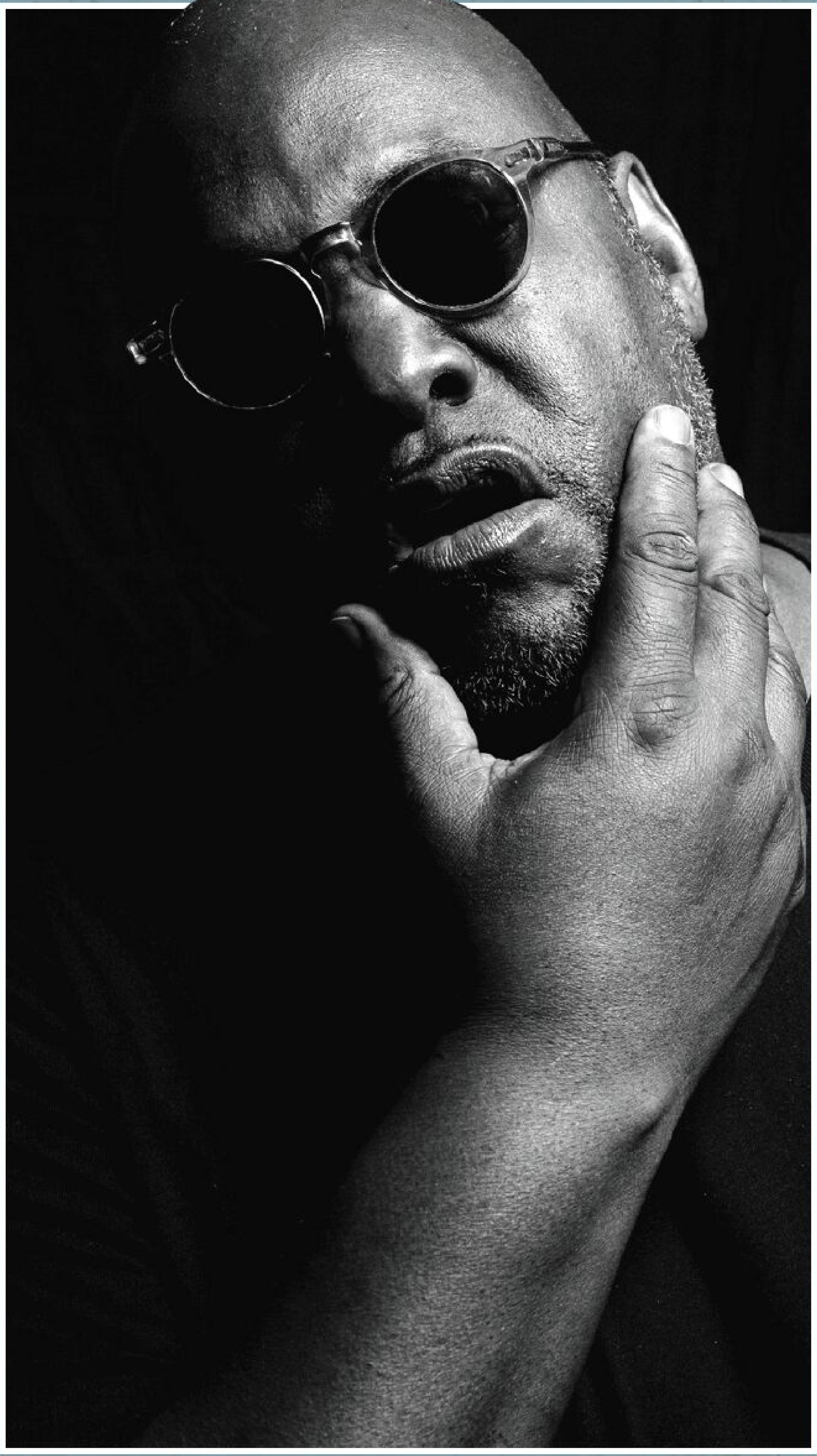

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STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN
BEACON OF THE BLUES HOPE

I had two very distinct and personal experiences with the great Texas Blues icon Stevie Ray Vaughan, both happened to be at the same place, six years apart.

The mid 70s through early 80s was not exactly a landmark period for rootsy, guitar driven music, the height of glam rock, disco era, big hair & spandex was like a thick, glittery, toxic fog.

Some of us in New York held tight to our guns, immersing ourselves even deeper into the Blues, but there wasn't a whole lot to look forward to on the horizon.

Then one chilly winter morning, 1983 I walked into the small, storefront messenger service I worked at, east of Union Square and blaring on the radio was the distinct sound of Texas Blues guitar, sounded a lot like Lightnin' Hopkins to me. I asked my boss Tony if this was the local college radio, the only place left that would dare to feature tracks of true Blues, but he said it was mainstream FM radio.

Both of us were Blues lovers, fixated on the tune, blistering, fat blues guitar, gritty earnest vocals, simple but super tight group. As it ended the DJ announced it was someone called Stevie Ray Vaughn with the release of his debut album, Texas Flood.

It was also announced that tickets just went on sale at the Beacon Theater.

The boss picked up the phone and reserved a couple of seats for us, just like that.

I didn't give it too much thought after that until the night of the show.

The large stage looked practically bare and very sparce when the trio came out, Stevie was in a blue kimono, large brim black hat and launched into a huge, wall of sound that I'd never quite heard live from just three guys. I'd seen Muddy Waters and Johnny Winter at this famous Beacon Theater a few years before, which was the most important concert I'd ever witnessed. Now this lightning charged, tornado twisting sound was just unstoppable and relentless from one song to the next. An occurrence that is now etched in my being.

Through this particular period it became increasingly noticeable that more Blues/Rock was being featured on the radio and it was clear; Stevie Ray Vaughan made rootsy guitar music cool again.

You could hear Stevie's specific influence on guitar players everywhere.

Stevie Ray made it cool to play Blues guitar again as well, with a very deliberate nod to his heroes and the original legends.

Fast forward six years to 1989 and I have just officially had released my first album; Brian Kramer & the Blues Masters featuring Junior Wells.

The album was just pressed and I got in touch with Junior in Chicago to let him know and wanted to get him a few copies. Turns out he and Buddy Guy were coming to town as part of the line-up for the Benson & Hedges Blues Festival in NYC at the Beacon Theater and he arranged for me a backstage pass for the event.

Now this was a stellar festival held at this incredible theater with blues icons like John Lee Hooker, Bobby Blue Bland, Johnny Winter, Dr. John, The Thunderbirds, to name a few.

I met with Junior when I was let in backstage and he was very pleased to receive the record, he then personally took me around to each dressing room to introduce me to all these important Blues figures, whose music has been an integral part of my nourishment.

There was some loose chatter backstage that Stevie Ray Vaughan, who was across town at this little venue called Madison Square Garden playing with Jeff Beck, may turn up after their show is finished.

The festival was sold out and packed, people howling in the aisles, but backstage was very chill and serene, mainly band members and artists checking each other out, catching up.

Then the backstage door swings opens and the familiar large brim, black hat shows itself; SRV has entered the building.

He made his way with familiarity to the old, single occupancy elevator and started up. On impulse, I took the staircase, that literally wound around the elevator shaft as it stopped on the top level, an area to store personal items.

As I entered the top, Stevie, hanging his coat looked over and I introduced myself, letting him know that I was a guest of Junior Wells.

I had under my arm a copy of the new LP and presented it to him. Stevie was very gracious looking over the record, instantly recognizing that he knew a few of the musicians involved.

He noticed Mick Taylor and somehow he asked off the cuff about Peter Green, who at that time was pretty much an enigma and disappeared off the scene, we both sharing and speculating on what little we knew.

I took that moment to personally thank him for bringing Blues based music back into the focus and making Blues guitar cool once again.

Stevie shook my hand, gave me a big warm grin and said "Next time I see you we'll talk about the record, after I listen to it".

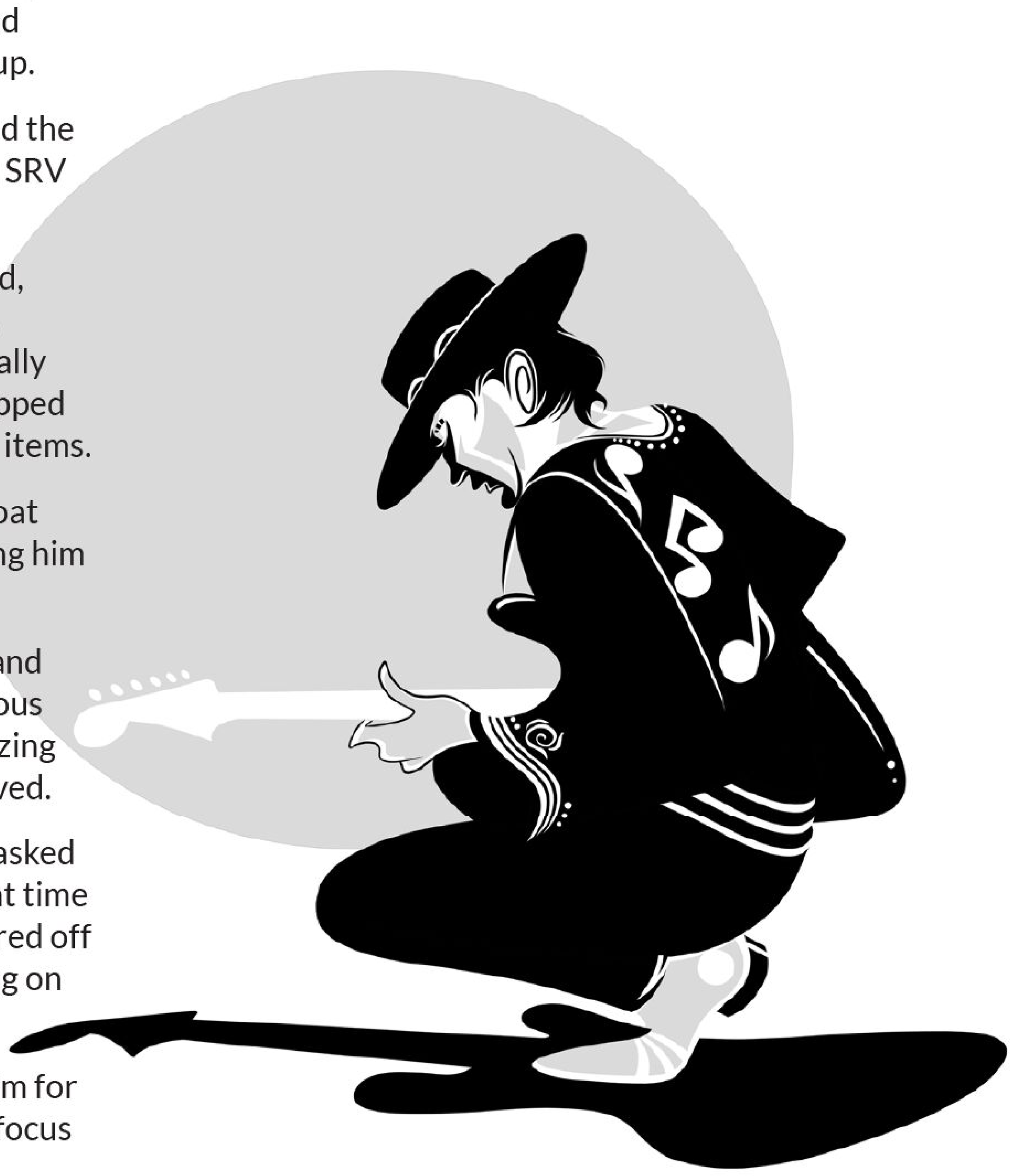
Stevie was very present and relaxed backstage. We both were caught oogling over various artists by the big curtain, off stage, Stevie giving me playful shoves and contorting has face, mimicking air-guitar every time John Lee Hooker hit a cool lick.

He then joined his brother Jimmy for a big grand finale on stage along with Buddy Guy, Junior, Dr. John and many of the main artists Stevie & Jimmy coyly playing off each other, looking clearly like life could not possibly be better.

As the festival came to an end, I accompanied Stevie out the back way.

Stevie walked to his limo, my album tucked under his arm and he turned and gave me a wave, leaving me optimistic about picking up where we left off somewhere down the line…

I've done a few tribute illustrations of SRV over the years, this is one of my latest, reminding me of that initial moment when Stevie Ray Vaughan became a Beacon of Blues hope for the salvation of cool music again.



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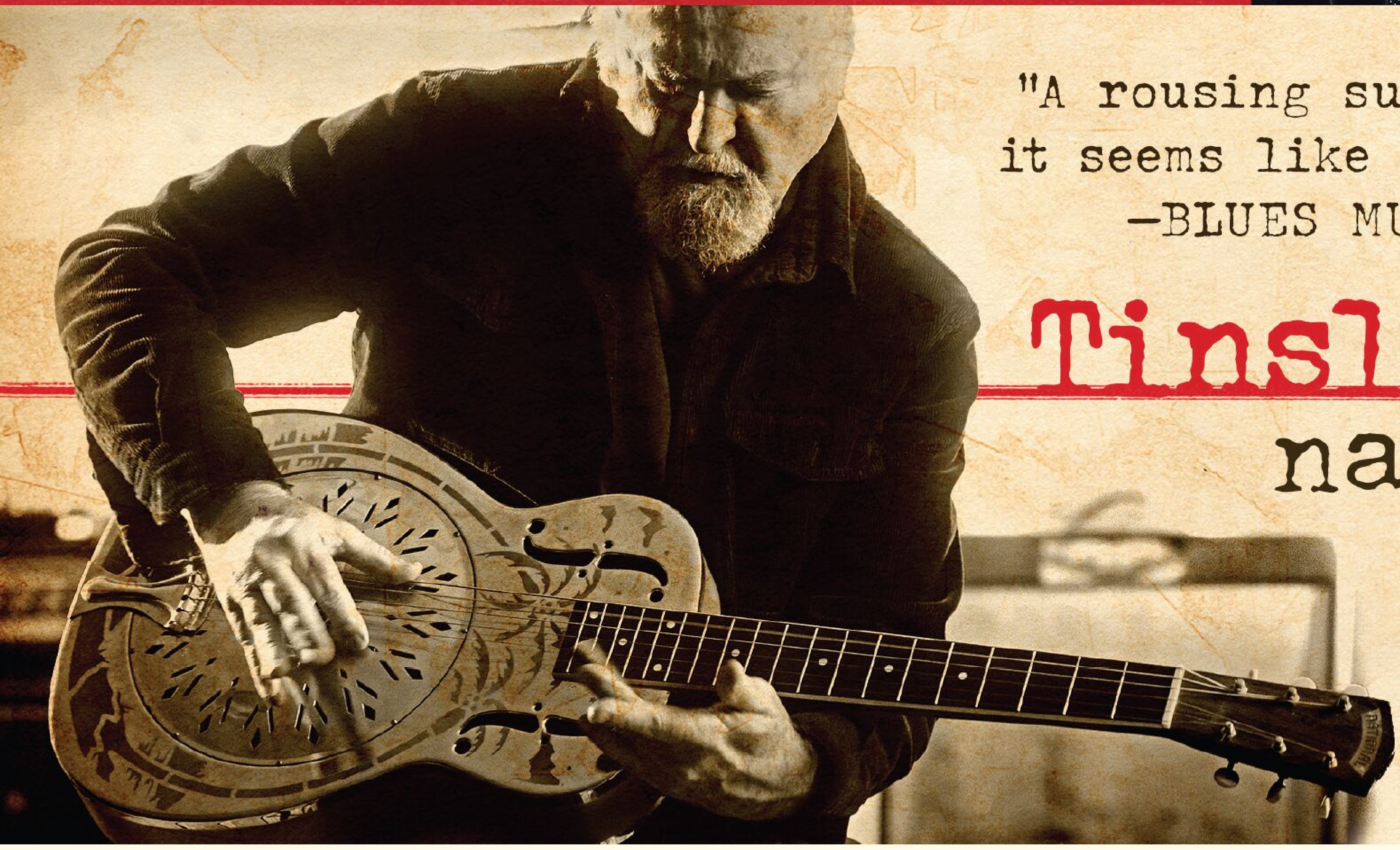

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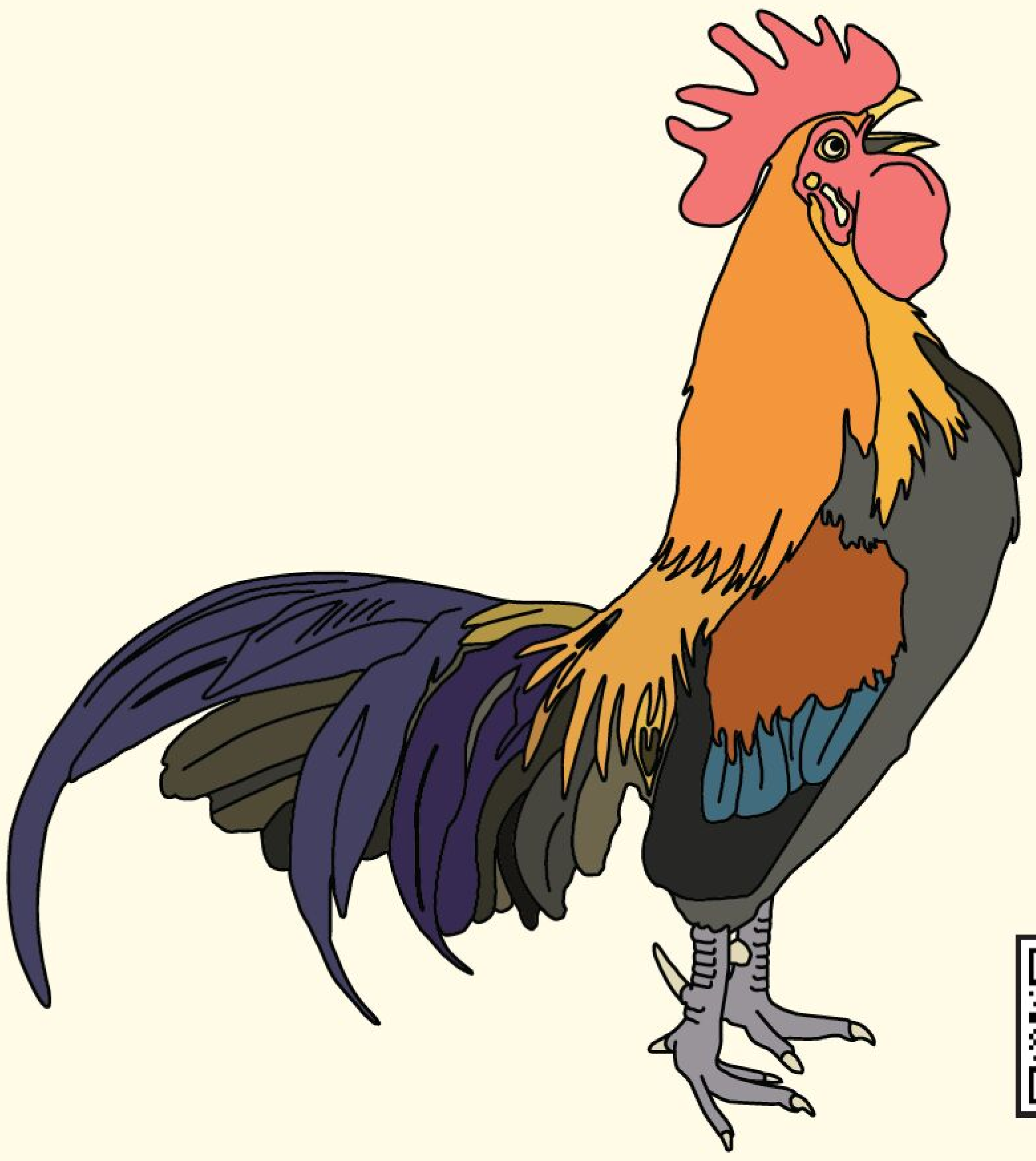

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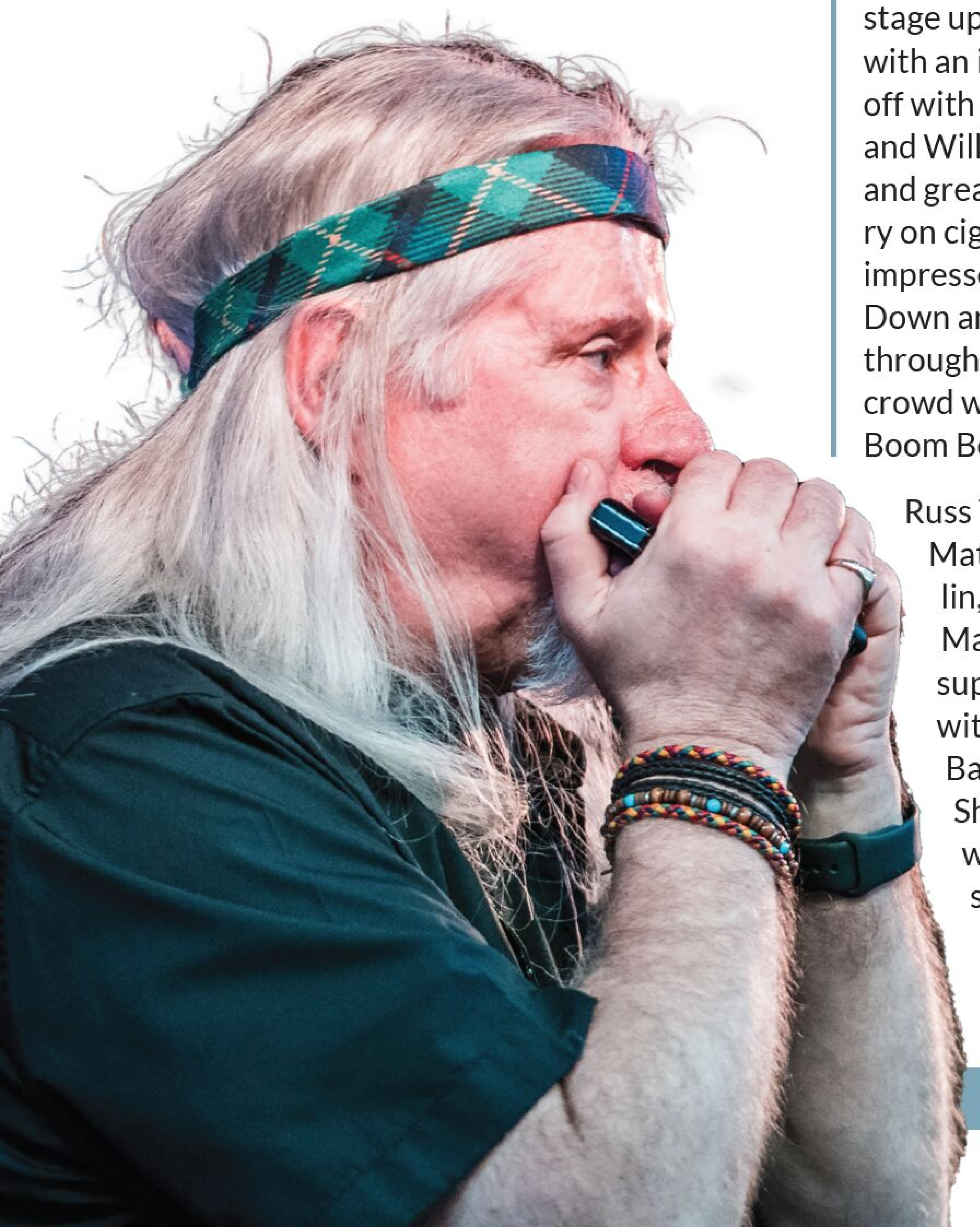
THE TYNESIDE AMERICANA BLUES FESTIVAL

AT CULLERCOATS CRESCENT CLUB 2024

Colin Campbell Ian Potter

The Tyneside Americana Blues Festival at Cullercoats Crescent Club, held from January 19th to 21st, 2024, successfully filled the void left by the discontinued Great British Rock & Blues Festival. Organized by Stephen Donelly and John Tate, the event featured three stages: Acoustic, Blues Matters, and Main.

Despite some hitches, such as a first-night fire alarm, the inaugural Tyneside Festival was a resounding success, attracting a sold-out crowd. The three stages offered a diverse range of music, from local talents like Robbie Reay and Willie Cran to national favourites like The Sensational Alex Harvey Experience.



FRIDAY

The Tyneside Festival's opening night buzzed with anticipation as attendees explored the seemingly small venue that revealed a labyrinth inside, featuring two stages downstairs, a main stage upstairs, and a VIP lounge—all accessible with an inclusive lift. The Acoustic stage kicked off with the traditional blues duo Robbie Reay and Willie Cran, blending humor, storytelling, and great Delta blues rhythms. Robbie's artistry on cigar box, resonator, and acoustic guitar impressed, with standout originals like Up And Down and Barefoot Blues. Their transition through two slots was seamless, engaging the crowd with Jekyll Can't Hide and a sublime Boom Boom rendition.

Russ Tippins and his band rocked the Blues Matters stage with a tribute to Led Zeppelin, setting a lively tone. Upstairs on the Main stage, The Eric Bell Trio delivered a superb set mixing standard blues covers with Eric's own catalog. The Redfish Blues Band, led by the charismatic Christian Sharpe, ignited the party downstairs with Tell The Truth and Girls Girls Girls, showcasing melodic tunes like Money Don't Make It Right and ending with Soulshine—a tight, crowd-favorite performance.

Returning to the Blues Matters stage, the local Teresa Watson Band impressed with soulful blues and crowd favorites like Blues Is My Business. The closing act, The Sensational Alex Harvey Experience, thrilled the audience with a theatrical delight, featuring masterful deliveries of songs like Faith Healer and Vambo. The singalong finale of Buff Bars Blues and Delilah sealed the night, leaving the packed crowd thoroughly entertained by this true headliner band.

SATURDAY

After a hearty breakfast, the main stage came alive with Yorkshire-based DC Blues, fronted by the effervescent Paul Winn, vocalist, and harmonica player. Accompanied by a tight band—Lloyd Massingham on lead guitar, Ben Darwin on bass guitar, Paul Thompson on drums, and Stephen Brandon on keyboards—they marked their territory with a unique rendition of Rollin' And Tumblin'. The band's chemistry was evident, highlighted by a powerful keyboard performance. They explored diverse styles, infusing gospel vibes into Take Me Down and igniting the crowd with the energetic Who Do You Love, featuring a well-received drum solo by "Tommo." The performance concluded memorably with Nervous Fella, engaging the crowd in a participatory treat.

Kyla Brox and guitarist Danny Blomeley graced the main stage with a wonderful show of full-on

raw soul blues, performing captivating songs such as Devils Bridge and Shaken And Stirred. Kyla's flute performance on Change Your Mind added a unique touch, while soulful and melodic tracks like Pain And Glory showcased the duo's impressive musicality. The upbeat Bluesman's Child, dedicated to Kyla's father Victor, and the singalong finale of 3.6.5. left a lasting impression, marking an impressive performance by the duo.

The Cinelli Brothers captivated the audience with a consummate performance on the main stage, blending bluesy styles with soul and Southern Rock. Songs from their upcoming release, Almost Exactly, including Dozen Roses and Fool's Paradise, showcased the band's musical versatility. The haunting Last Cigarette, featuring Stephen Giry on drums, and the demanded Choo Ma Gum concluded their set, leaving the crowd in raptures.

West Brook and Swamp Tea, a local band with roots in Florida, brought hot swamp and funk to the Blues Matters stage. Their dynamic performance featured tracks like Them Changes and Good Hearted Woman, with outstanding lap steel guitar playing and a mellow rendition of Love Light. The crowd sang along and thoroughly enjoyed the band's lively set, creating a fantastic atmosphere.

Local favorites Stan The Band rocked the Blues Matters stage with a legendary four-piece lineup, delivering emotionally charged bluesy tunes like Midnight Angel and the crowd-engaging Love This City. The hauntingly beautiful Turn Out The Light showcased the band's ability to captivate the audience. The Allmans Project, a sideline project by the band Safehouse, took the main stage by storm, offering a headlining performance with powerful vocals by lead singer Chris Peebles. Their set, including favorites like Rambling Man, Soulshine, and Midnight Rider, closed Saturday night on a high note, leaving the captivated audience thoroughly entertained.

SUNDAY

Kicking off the Blues Matters stage was the highly anticipated Greig Taylor Band, delivering the first of their two sets. Led by Greig himself, the band showcased an intoxicating full sound on tracks like the heart-wrenching Ain't Got You, a true bluesy tune. Starting with the upbeat Born To Love You, they set the tone for the performance. Personal songs like Crucifixion Blues and crowd-pleaser 3 Chords And The Truth resonated well. The title track from their newest release, The Light, was delivered with passion and honesty, addressing addiction. The set concluded with the lively Gravy Train, leaving the crowd in high spirits. The band later played the main stage to a packed house.

Heading to the Acoustic stage, AS H LYNCH, a rising North East star, delivered a solo spot with reinterpretations, including Tom Petty's Won't Back Down and Springsteen's Cover Me. With great vocals and an appreciative audience, she showcased her talent and also had a well-attended solo set on the main stage.

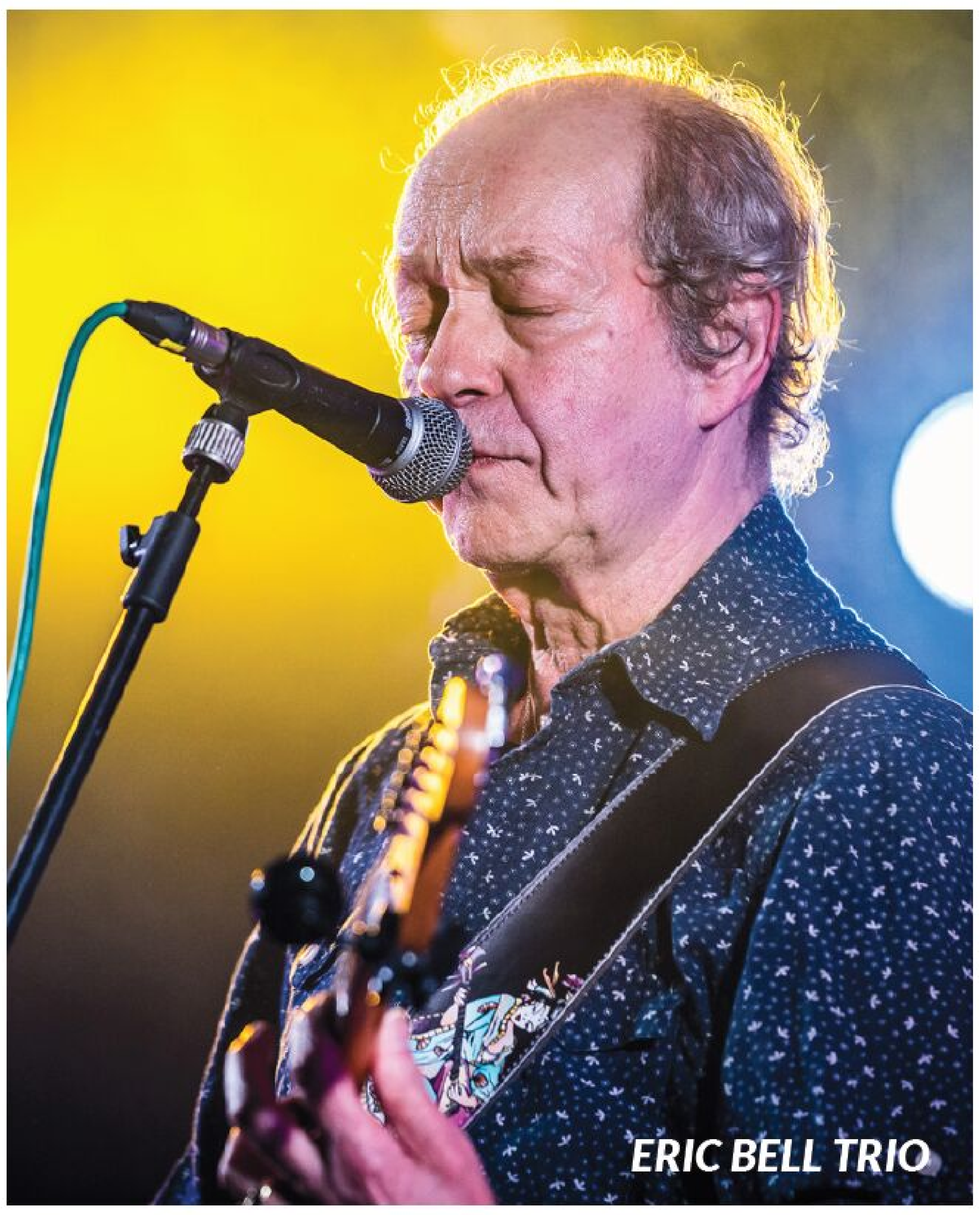
On the Blues Matters stage, Ten Bob Blind, a new female-fronted country/americana band from the North East, impressed with an eclectic set featuring favorites like Someday, Sin City, and Wedding Night. The duo Oil City Shakers, comprising Ronnie Semple on harmonica and Bob Bates on guitar and cigar box guitar, delivered a masterclass in stomping swampy dirty blues music, leaving the crowd thrilled with their powerful sound.

Martin Turner, ex Wishbone Ash, graced the main stage with a performance featuring a favorite, Blowing Free, drawing a large crowd. The Blues Matters stage welcomed the Lounge Lizards from Gateshead and the Tyne delta, a five-piece band with an eclectic mix of old-style R&B, soul, rock and roll. Their rendition of People Get Ready and interpretation of The Letter engaged the audience, showcasing their talent in mixing genres.

Gerry Jablonski and The Electric Band, a Scottish favorite, took the main stage by storm, delivering a powerful performance from start to finish. With energy and power, they rocked the venue with Breaking The Stones and brought in blues rock with Koss. Emotional moments, such as Lewis's rendition of Anybody, captivated the audience. The set included a new tune, Cold, and showcased Gerry's talented guitar chops on Nessun Dorma. The penultimate tune, Angel Of Love, rocked the venue, concluding with the highlight of the whole festival, Slave To The Rhythm.

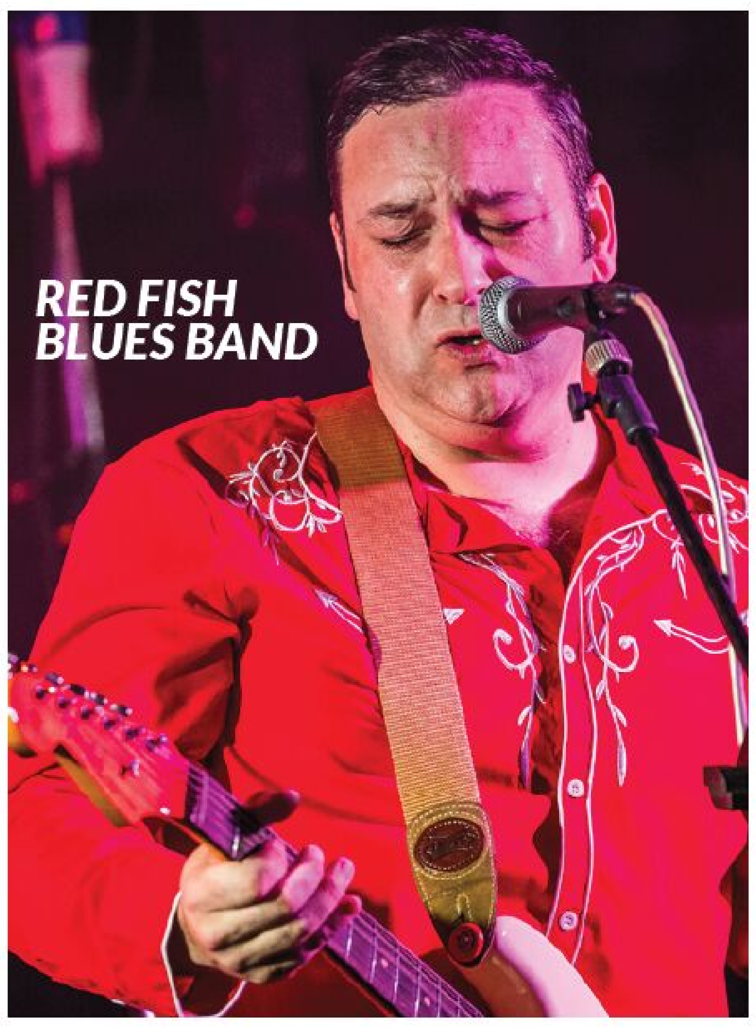
The festival proved to be a success, with full houses, a great atmosphere, and the hope for a second Tyneside festival next year.

THE CINELLI BROTHERS

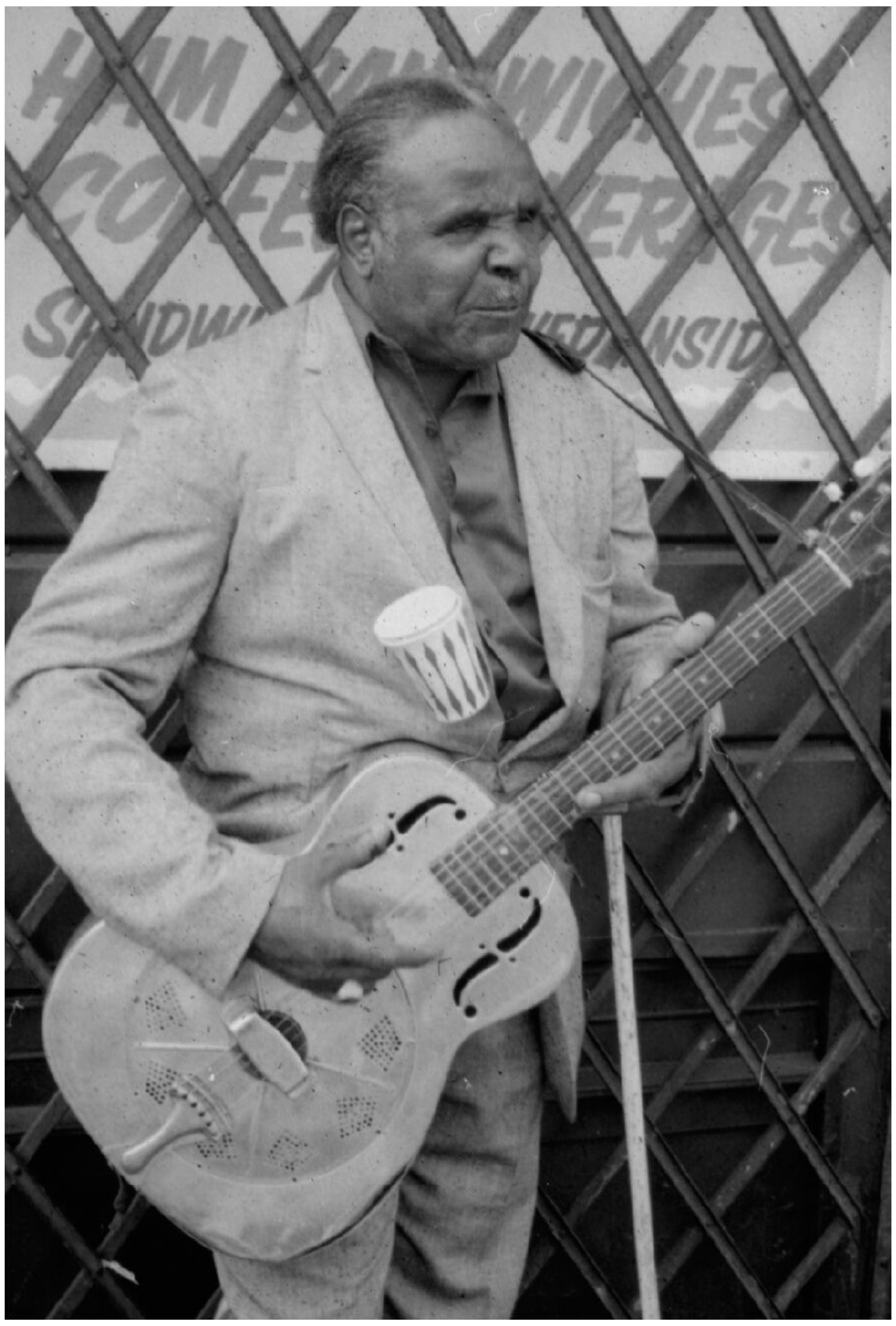


ERIC BELL TRIO

ROBBIE REAY



RED FISH BLUES BAND



BLIND ARVELLA GRAY

This story originally ran in the Chicago Reader on January 7, 1972. The author and photographer, Cary Baker, went on to become one the USA's finest music publicists and promoters before retiring a few short years ago. Blues Matters Magazine thanks him for his consent to publish this wonderful article.

Cary Baker

Blind Arvella Gray plays his slide guitar on Halsted just north of the Maxwell Street intersection in 1971. Cary S. Baker took this photo as a teenager. Credit: Cary S. Baker

A blind man singing on the streets. It almost sounds as if it would be outlawed or long extinct by 1972. A blind street singer, singing traditional work songs and blues, with endless stories to tell would be institutionalized, or somehow put away. But blind Arvella Gray is real. He plays on decaying Maxwell street—against the building walls, crossing the streets, or on busses and trains. On Fridays, you'll find him standing on the corner of Grand and State, blocking the doorway of the Jazz Record Mart, and collecting coins in a tin cup.

Gray has been singing and playing a National steel-body guitar for many years. He has played on Maxwell Street since he came up from Texas in the 30's, back when the area was justifiably known as "Jewtown." On the street, you'd find, and still find today, boothes and stores carrying old shoes, trunks, and scratched 78's. Today, in additon, you'll find opened Temptations LP's, as well as Little Walter's Ora-Nelle 78's, but Arvella was playing there when the Ora-Nelle records were released in 1947.

His favorite song is "John Henry," but it's technically not the same song that Los John and Lightnin' Sam record intermittently. Gray speaks of Maxwell Street people and places, but starts at the bottom with John Henry speaking to his foreman. "Henry died in the hills, but before he died, he said. . . . " It's a trip listening to Gray's monotonous guitar work on the song. It's so unskilled and yet so beautiful that it can't be described.

All this comes into perspective when you realize that Arvella's left hand contains only a thumb and the two farthest fingers, the natural place to hold the guitar neck. Arvella's loss of two fingers comes from the same accident that blinded him in 1930. Now he roams the streets wearing a torn Salvation Army sports jacket, a cane, an aqua carrying bag, and reams of photos of himself, which he distributes. His guitar work is reminiscent—not deliberately, of course—of a tampoura, the Indian drone instrument that backs Shankar. Though it's raunchy and unskilled, it somehow fits into place. Nobody knows if Gray is conscious of the subtlety in his monotonous guitar playing, but I hope he stays with it.

"ARVELLA'S LEFT HAND CONTAINS ONLY A THUMB AND THE TWO FARTHEST FINGERS"

Cary S. Baker helped Blind Arvella Gray find a label to release his only album, The Singing Drifter, in 1973. Baker's own imprint, Conjuroo Recordings, reissued a modified version of the record in 2005.

When I saw him last, he told me that he's learning to play the guitar. As he works now, he wears a bottleneck on his fourth finger, and is limited because his fretting hand is minus three fingers. What he's trying to develop is a reverse stance—his crippled hand picking, and his complete hand fretting. He won't play on the streets this way for a while, though.

Gray can stay with "John Henry" for up to 150 verses. He also finds it hard to complete another song without a verse about John Henry, or Maxwell Street. His other songs include "Freedom Bus" (a melodic spiritual protest), "Freedom Riders," "Good Morning Blues," "Key to the Highway," "Have Mercy Mr. Percy," and "That's Allright." He sometimes jams with guitarist blind James Brewer, opening up a whole repertoire of new songs. His songs tend to start with rural lyrics, and then become urban gradually.

There is irony in Arvella's reception these

days. I saw people walking down Halsted, walking down State Street, or walking down Maxwell or Morgan. They'd pass by him, and either drop a penny or a dime into his tin cup, or completely ignore his presence. A few people even snickered as they went by. A black teenage boy, listening to a small transistor radio tuned to WGRT or WVON, walked by absorbed in an Impressions hit. He gave not a thought to blind Arvella Gray, whose blues represented the source of the Impression's musical idiom.

A thought struck me: Why not record an LP of Arvella on the street? The noise of cars, horns, people talking, busses—these are his natural setting. Then I realized: Gray is constantly complaining about the sound of his 45's, so imagine his disgust for music with streetnoise! It still would be interesting, however, to set up a tape recorder on the sidewalk and catch Arvella's "thank you" to those that give him spare change. Arvella badly wants to record, however. He's got hours of tape of himself, ready to be issued.

Arvella told me about the effect of his blindness. He says being blind is like having someone place a pillow over your head, or like looking through a long black stovepipe. He says his head is a mass of grey. He neither remembers nor can imagine what various things look like. He even claims that things were darker when he first became blind than now. Sometimes he says that his blindness is all a dream—that one day he'll wake up and see. Unfortunately, this is not possible. Arvella's eyes have diminished to minimal size, and he's been blind for 40 years. Although he's been in institutions for the handicapped, and marked off as an invalid, he never feels sorry for himself. He travels all through the city on trains and busses. And in the midst of his singing and the sound of congested traffic, he somehow acknowledges the presence of a listener by saying "hi." He remembered my voice from the last time I met him last summer.

Maxwell Street may not have long to live. The University of Illinois Circle Campus is encroaching from the north, and the Ora-Nelle Record Shop is closing after 35 years. Arvella will move on, keeping Maxwell alive in his own way. "John Henry" may have more verses, yet.

And a final word to our readers from from Cary Baker:

Chicago street singer Blind Arvella Gray, one of the most pivotal figures in my life, was born 116 years ago, January 28, 1906 in Somerville, Texas.

I met Arvella when he was played on Chicago's Maxwell Street Market, a scrappy open-air flea market just southwest of Chicago's Loop near Halsted St. & Roosevelt Rd. My father took me there at age 13 to show me where his parents, Jewish Eastern European immigrants, had once shopped. He thought he could take me there once and that would be it. One and done. But instead, I saw all kinds of blues street singers — Blind Arvella Gray, Jim Brewer, Little Pat Rushing, Maxwell Street Jimmy Davis, Big John Wrencher, Granny Littricebey — and my life was changed.

I returned tor Maxwell Street every Sunday I possibly could for the next 14 years to shop for dusty 78 RPM records and hear street singers.

Blind Arvella Gray seemed to play an endless loop of the folk song "John Henry." There was no beginning and no end. He just kept on singing it accompanied by his sparse slide guitar work, figuring that passersby were not holding him to a three-minute song length limit. He'd embellished the traditional folk song with references to Maxwell and Halsted Streets.

I got Arvella's phone number, called him up, did an impromptu stealth interview and wrote it up for the neophyte Chicago Reader, which published it as a cover story in 1971. I was 15.

Next, I called a barndance-era Country & Western label in my hometown of Willmette, Ill. (Birch Records), and asked if they'd be interested in recording this guy. They were. Arrangements were made. So the label owner and I picked up Arvella at his South Side apartment and drove down the Dan Ryan Expwy. to Sound Unlimited Studios in south suburban Harvey, Ill. — best known for hillbilly and rockabilly recordings — and we recorded the entire album of blues, folk songs and spirituals in one take, all night long. We drove home at dawn.

Then it was time to remember I was a teenager. Some buddies and I visited the University of Wisconsin Madison campus whereupon I saw a flyer on a telephone pole that Arvella was playing a frat house, "Guys," I said to my friends, "this is where we'll be staying tonight. I have an idea." So we went to the frat house, saw Arvella play, and offered to drive him home to Chicago the next day in exchange for couches and floors upon which to crash. Arvella, asleep in a recliner, arose first and woke up the rest of us, announcing it was time to drive to Chicago. "Jeez, Arvella, it's only 6:30 a.m.!"

Although blind 30 years thanks to a gun battle (he obviously lost), he directed us back to his apartment at 48th & Dorchester on Chicago's South Side with GPS-like navigation.

I ended up attending Northern Illinois University instead, and I booked him to the town's world-class folk coffeehouse, Juicy John Pink's.

34 years later, in 2005, I woke up one day and it occurred to me (for some reason) that the vinyl LP on Birch Records had never been reissued on CD. So I formed a label, Conjuroo Records and hooked up Thirty Tigers distribution. The CD came out and sold very few copies but was reviewed by Jon Pareles in The New York Times and by David Fricke in Rolling Stone. Bullseye.

Feel free to buy a copy — I'll be happy to sell you one for $10 postpaid. DM me for info.

I should mention that Mr. Gray died in 1980 at age 74. I'd lost touch with him and wasn't aware of a memorial service.

But somehow or other, a blind street singer who rode boxcars from Texas to get to Chicago by way of Peoria (where he was shot and blinded) helped an overly ambitious suburban kid define his career. And hopefully that same kid (me) helped him redefine his own career. For a moment there, he was playing coffeehouses and concerts. Although he faithfully returned to Maxwell Street every Sunday to play for spare change, from whence I found him.

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STEVE HARRISON'S

RECORD ROUND-UP

ERIC CLAPTON-DEREK & THE DOMINOS

Eric Clapton certainly needs no introduction as a Blues artist in this, or in any other magazine. He has, since the very early sixties been the voice of the Blues in the UK, and, let's face it, all over the world, especially in America where his influences and his musical idols originated from.

From an early age, he became embroiled and captivated by Blues music, not interested one iota in the sugary pop music of the day. As part of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, he was thrust upon the Blues world on the world-famous, and world-renowned album, commonly referred to as, The Beano album.

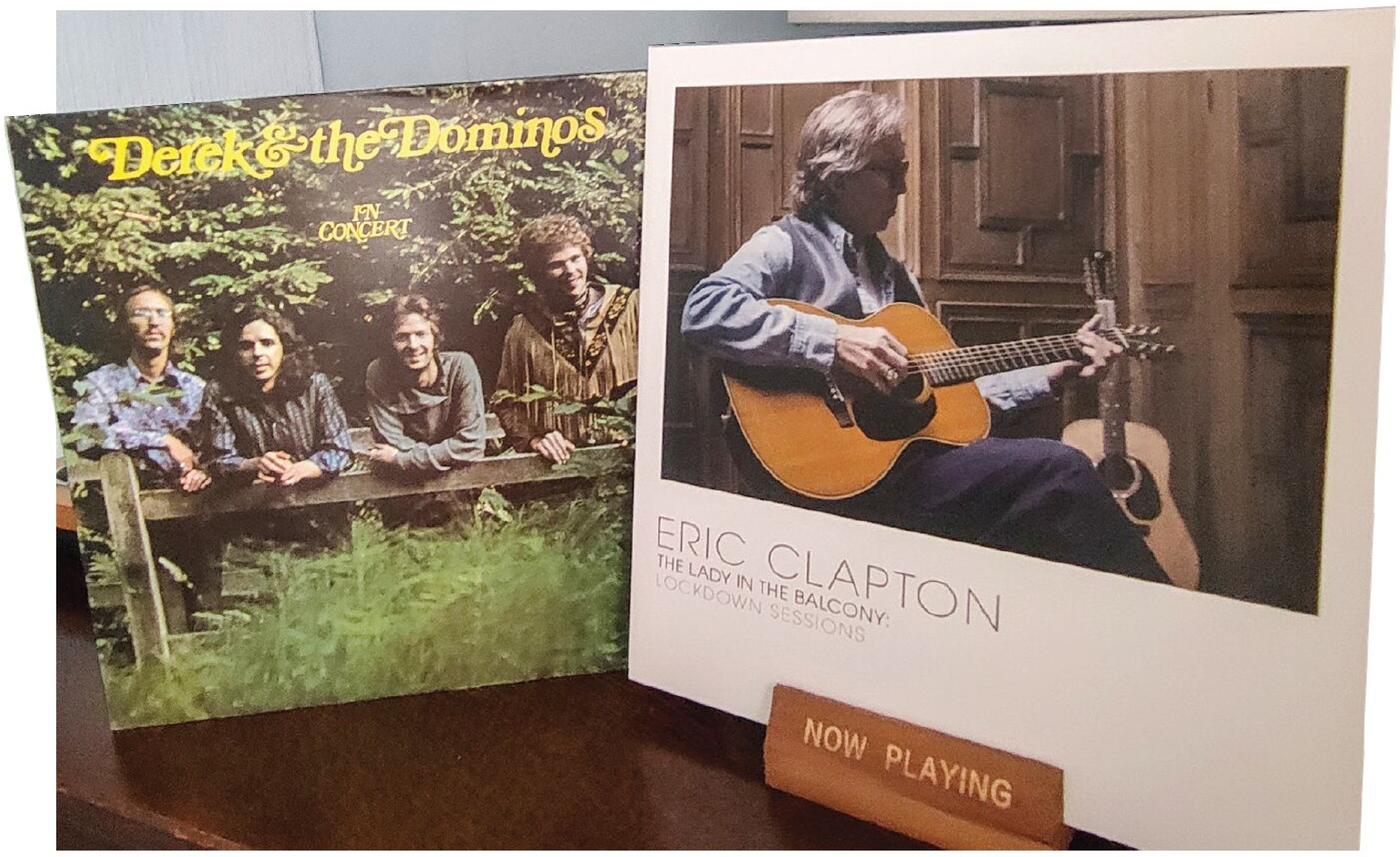
Now I could have waxed lyrical about this particular album, I could have filled this entire magazine with thoughts regarding The Beano album, but it's another part of the Eric Clapton discography that I have chosen to concentrate on. One that is just as important and ground-breaking as starting with John Mayall. This short-lived band produced some of the greatest music and songs that, up until then, the world could only imagine, the Blues world, more than any other genre. Now, I'm sure that you are thinking about, Layla And Other Assorted Love Songs, well, I'm not, I'm talking about, Derek & The Dominoes, Live At The Filmore East.

This live recording certainly brought out the very best of this band, Blues, Gospel, and Country, it is such a shame that things didn't quite work out for the band, on stage or off. All of the members had been part of a few bands, albeit as guests, that included, George Harrison, Delaney & Bonnie, and the forerunners of The Allman Brothers Band. Live At The Filmore East captured the best of the best, with songs such as, Have You Ever Loved A Woman, Presence Of The Lord, and, Let It Rain. It is, in my humble opinion, one of the finest Live albums ever recorded. It shows Eric Clapton at his most comfortable, a musicologist, a Blues troubadour, a man at peace with himself, albeit for a short while.

Side 1
- Why Does Love Got To Be So Sad
- Got To Get Better In A Little While

Side 2
- Let It Rain
- Presence Of The Lord

Side 3
- Tell The Truth
- Bottle Of Red Wine



Side 4
- Roll It Over
- Blues Power
- Have You Ever Loved A Woman

Fast forward 48 years, and to another milestone in the story of Eric Clapton. Lady In The Balcony, Lockdown Sessions was released in 2021. It was a result of the pandemic, Eric was due to appear at The Royal Albert Hall for a series of shows, it could be called Eric's front room for the amount of times he has graced this iconic venue. The shows were inevitably cancelled, but undeterred, Eric gathered his band when things started to open up, near his home in the South of England. This resulted in an acoustic album that many said was part 2 of his Unplugged album, released some 19 years earlier. It is easy to make that assumption, and I guess it is kind of true, but Lady In The Balcony is much more than a follow-up album.

Yes, it's true that Lady In The Balcony is an album full of Blues classics, performed acoustically, but the Unplugged album was recorded for MTV in its heyday, Lady In The Balcony is a personal album, very close to Eric's heart, every Blues tune a firm favourite of Eric, and indeed the whole band. I admit, that a couple of tracks appear on both albums, but the latter contains a far different mentality than the first.

One reason is because of the circumstances in the recording of it, a worldwide pandemic changed the perceptions of the whole planet, which is not lost here. It also highlights the band members, all of them have played with Eric off and on for decades. The band recorded the songs in one room, playing live, and the result is an album that will become as popular as the Unplugged album. This again shows Eric in a very comfortable frame of mind, playing with dear friends, playing the songs that have most influenced him, and allowing himself to be free of the constraints of what the modern-day recording studios want. This is a very personal album, one of his finest.

Side 1
- Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out
- Golden Ring
- Black Magic Woman
- Man Of The World
- Kerry

Side 2
- After Midnight
- Bell Bottom Blues
- Key To The Highway
- River Of Tears

Side 3
- Rock Me Baby
- Believe In Life
- Going Down Slow
- Layla

Side 4
- Tears In Heaven
- Long Distance Call
- Bad Boy
- Got My Mojo Working

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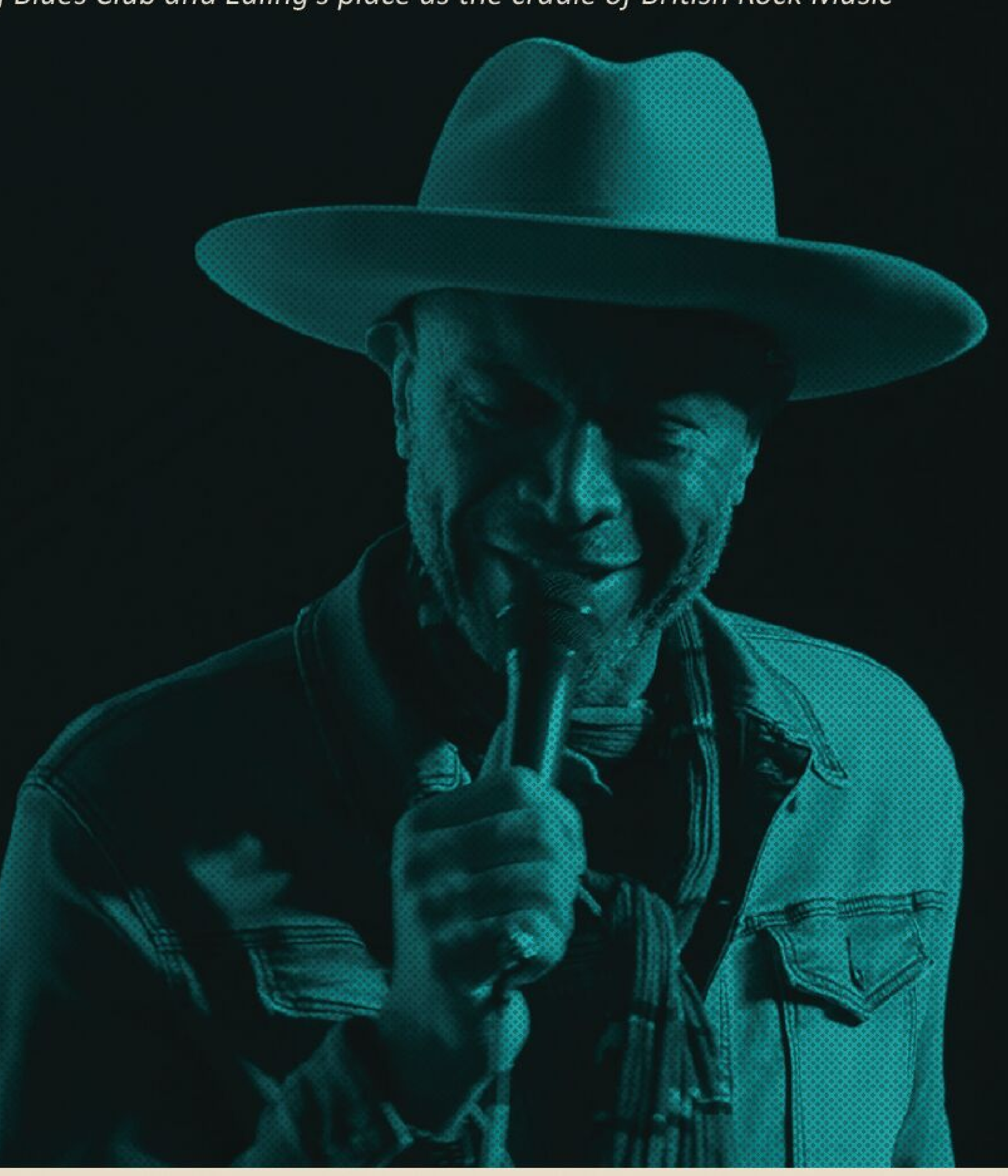

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BLUESICOLOGY! BY DANI WILDE

HOODOO, MAGIC, AND THE BLUES

As a child, my Dad would regularly play blues music in our house.

I grew up in the 1990's, in England, and yet, this African American music from as early as the 1920's had cast a spell on me. So many elements of the blues got me hooked, from the beautifully moving pentatonic guitar lines of BB King, to the wonderfully emotive vocal delivery of Etta James. Yet, as an aspiring songwriter, it was the unique metaphor and imagery of blues lyrics that weaved their way through my imagination like magic, conjuring pictures in my mind, taking me to a different place and time... What were the 'Crossroads' that Robert Johnson sang of? Why did Muddy Waters need a 'Black Cat Bone? What is this 'Mojo hand' that Lightening Hopkins is heading down to Louisiana to search for?

The answers can be found in the spiritual practice of Hoodoo. Like the blues, Hoodoo culture is rooted in the experiences of enslaved African Americans in the Southern United States, with its origins tracing back to West Africa. Practitioners of Hoodoo are called rootworkers, conjure men or conjure women, and root doctors.

In Blues Music, we can hear the West African influence in the use of antiphony (call and response). Scholar Gerhard Kubik argues that Islamic West African music had an impact on the melismatic and improvised nature of Blues vocals. This can arguably be heard in the Islamic Call to Prayer. Use of blue notes in blues vocals and guitar lines are also taken from traditional West African melodies. Instruments like the banjo and the diddley bow, a one-string instrument used in early blues are adaptations of West African instruments like the akonting and xalam.

West African Traditions brought by enslaved African people to America also form the basis of Hoodoo spiritual practices. This includes:

- Honouring and seeking guidance from ancestors
- Belief in the spirit world and its interaction with the physical world
- Herbalism: Utilizing plants and their properties for healing and other purposes

As a result of the transatlantic slave trade, the West African origins of Hoodoo and Blues traditions were fused with North American, European, Christian, and Native American traditions in their formation. It's important to note that Hoodoo was created within slavery, whereas the Blues developed from the work songs and spirituals sung by African-American slaves, however did not evolve as its own genre until the late 1800's, after the abolition of slavery. With Hoodoo and Blues traditions both being rooted in West African culture and slavery, it makes sense that Hoodoo imagery found its place in blues music.

"Hoodoo Lady, you can turn water to wine" sings Memphis Minnie in 1936.

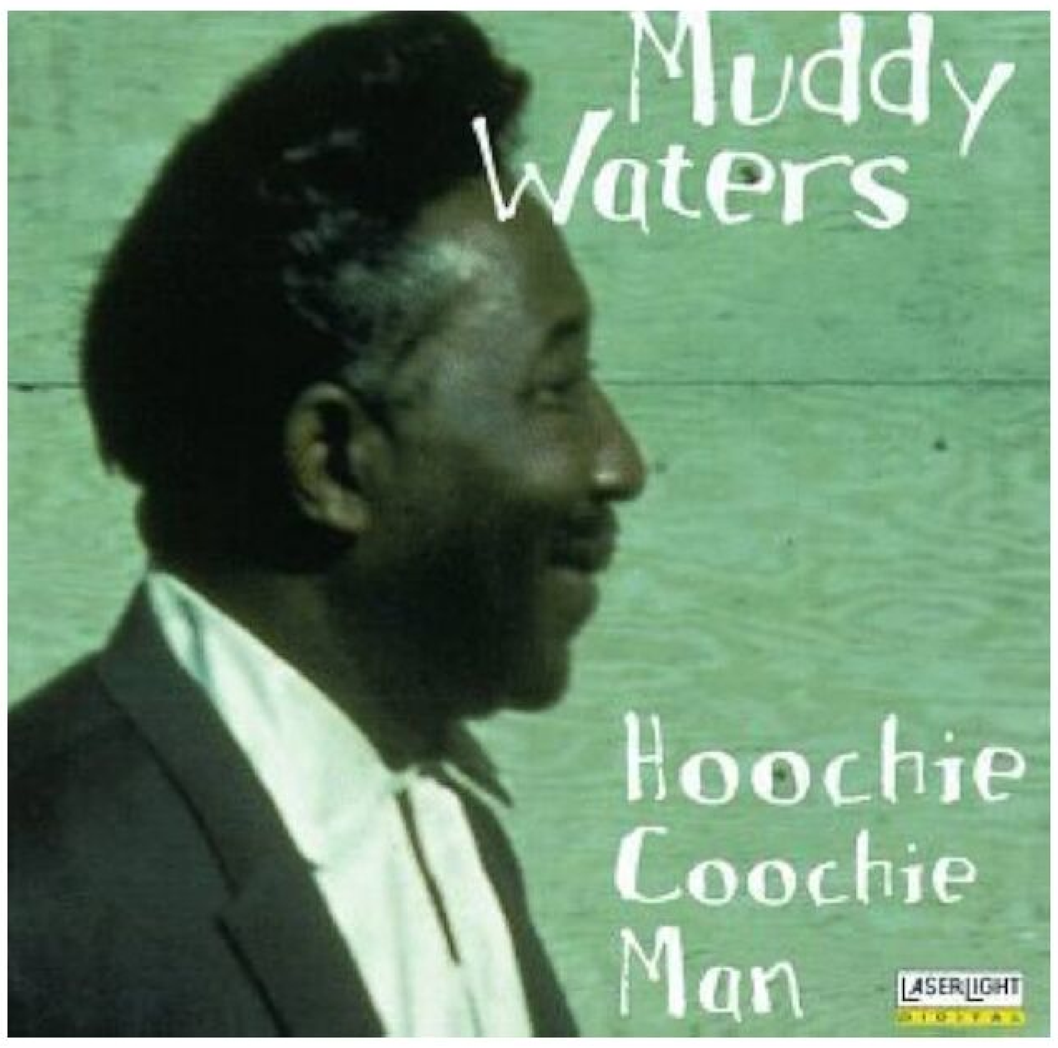
Memphis Minnie's song Hoodoo Lady Blues was released just a few years after the Prohibition era (1920 to 1933) when the United States prohibited the production, importation, transportation and sale of alcoholic beverages. Minnie rose to fame in Prohibition, playing in speakeasies and juke joints where alcohol was served illegally. The idea of this magical woman turning water to wine becomes all the more fantastic when you appreciate this rebellious context. I also love the feminist nature of this lyric, in that usually we associate Jesus with being able to turn water to wine, but here Minnie creates the image of an all-powerful majestic female! It is likely that Minnie

Whilst Hoodoo Practitioners do not claim to literally be able to turn water to wine, their belief system does associate specific herbs with symbolic meanings and energies. For example, basil can symbolize love and protection, and pepper can represent power and warding off evil.
In his song Hoochie Coochie Man, Muddy Waters sings:
"I got a black cat bone, I got mojo too. I got John the conqueroo, I'm going to mess with you!"

In Hoodoo, John the Conqueror, also known as High John de Conqueror, John the Conqueroo, or simply High John, refers to a trickster character in African American folklore. In one folk story, John is an African prince, the son of a king of Congo who rode upon a giant crow called 'Old Familiar.' In this story, John was sold as a slave in America. Despite his enslavement, his spirit was never broken.

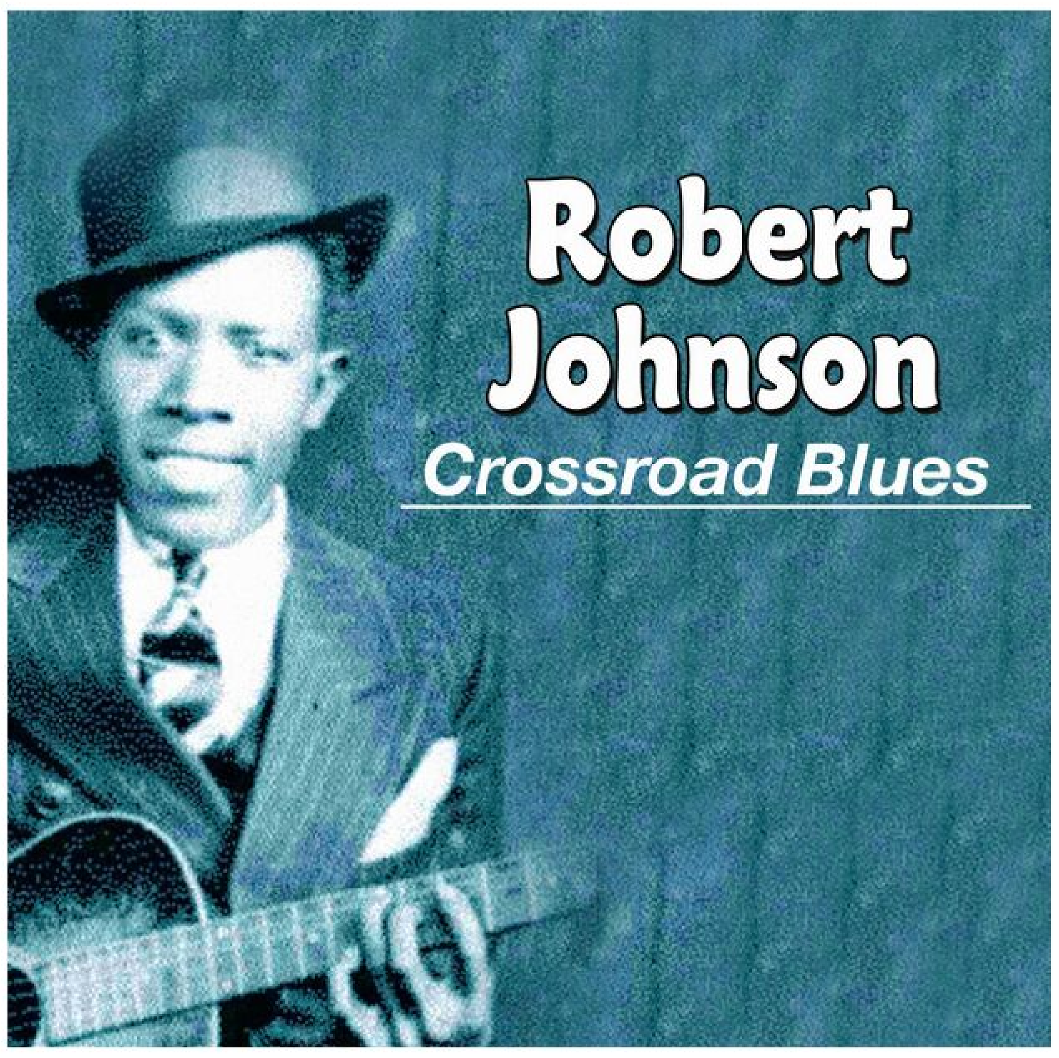
The character is depicted as a resilient individual who overcomes hardship by outsmarting those in power. The name is also associated with the roots of the plant Ipomoea purga. In Hoodoo, these roots are considered powerful; they hold the symbolic connection to the folk hero's characteristics. During slavery in the Southern United States, some African American's believed the root would protect them from beatings by their slaveholders. The root is used in various Hoodoo practices, such as:

- Mojo bags: Carried for protection, luck, and overcoming difficulties.
- Rituals: To attract positive outcomes in various aspects of life, such as love or wealth
- Folk medicine: Practitioners believe the roots possess healing properties



Muddy Waters grew up in poverty on a plantation just outside of Clarksdale Mississippi. He was raised by his Grandmother, as his Mother died shortly after his birth. Muddy Water's reference to this special root in his song is poignant, because Muddy himself, like High John, became a cultural hero, overcoming oppression in his rise to the top of his field as 'The Father of Modern Chicago Blues'. When Muddy sings about 'Mojo' he is referring to a Hoodoo 'Mojo Bag'- a small fabric pouch also known as a conjure bag, that would serve as a

protective and empowering charm!
As for the 'Black Cat Bone', this magical charm could either be held in a Mojo bag, with other magical herbs, or boiled and held in one's mouth whilst chanting incantations. This could achieve magic including invisibility, good luck (especially in gambling), protection from harm and love spells. The black cat bone is even linked to the concept of rebirth after death, symbolising the power to overcome challenges and emerge triumphant!



Bluesman Robert Johnson used Hoodoo imagery and metaphor in many of his songs including his hugely influential song Crossroad Blues, 1937. Son House, a fellow bluesman and contemporary of Robert Johnson, claimed Johnson was a mediocre guitarist before a mysterious period of absence. Legend claims Johnson ventured to the crossroads of Highways 49 and 61 in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Here, he supposedly met the devil who, in exchange for his soul, gifted him with exceptional guitar skills and mastery of the blues. This story initially circulated about an older bluesman named Tommy Johnson (unrelated to Robert). However, the tale held a more eerie relevance for Robert Johnson, who died tragically at the young age of 27, after a life marked by constant travel and hardship. His unique recordings, made just a year before his death, continue to possess a hauntingly captivating quality.

The concept of the crossroads in Hoodoo stems from the 'Kongo cosmogram', a spiritual symbol from Central Africa that made its way into African American folklore during the slave trade. This symbol, often depicted as an X-shaped cross, represents the rising and setting of the sun, and the cyclical nature of life and death. Crossroads serve as a physical manifestation of this cosmogram in the practice of Hoodoo.
The belief of West African crossroads spirits were also brought to the United States during the transatlantic slave trade. For example, the Yoruba people would leave gifts for a trickster deity called Eshu-Elegba, whom they believed resided at the crossroads. However, the word Eshu-Elegba does not exist in Hoodoo because the names of such African deities were lost during slavery.

The crossroads continue to hold significant meaning in Hoodoo practice: this meeting point of two paths represents the convergence of the physical and spiritual worlds and the crossing of paths between the living and the dead; where one might communicate with the ancestral spirits.

Another fascinating Hoodoo tradition that originated within West Central Africa's Kongo religion is the use of 'Goofer dust'.
Goofer dust is a traditional Hoodoo hexing concoction that has been sung about in a number of popular blues songs. The word goofer has Kongo origins and comes from the Kikongo word Kufwa which means "to die."
Goofer dust is mentioned in the Willie Mabon blues song "I Don't Know".

Mabon sings:
"I'm gettin' sick and tired of the way you do
Good kind papa gotta poison you
Sprinkle goofer dust all around your bed
Wake up one of these mornings, find your own self dead"

IN BLUES MUSIC, WE CAN HEAR THE WEST AFRICAN INFLUENCE IN THE USE OF ANTIPHONY

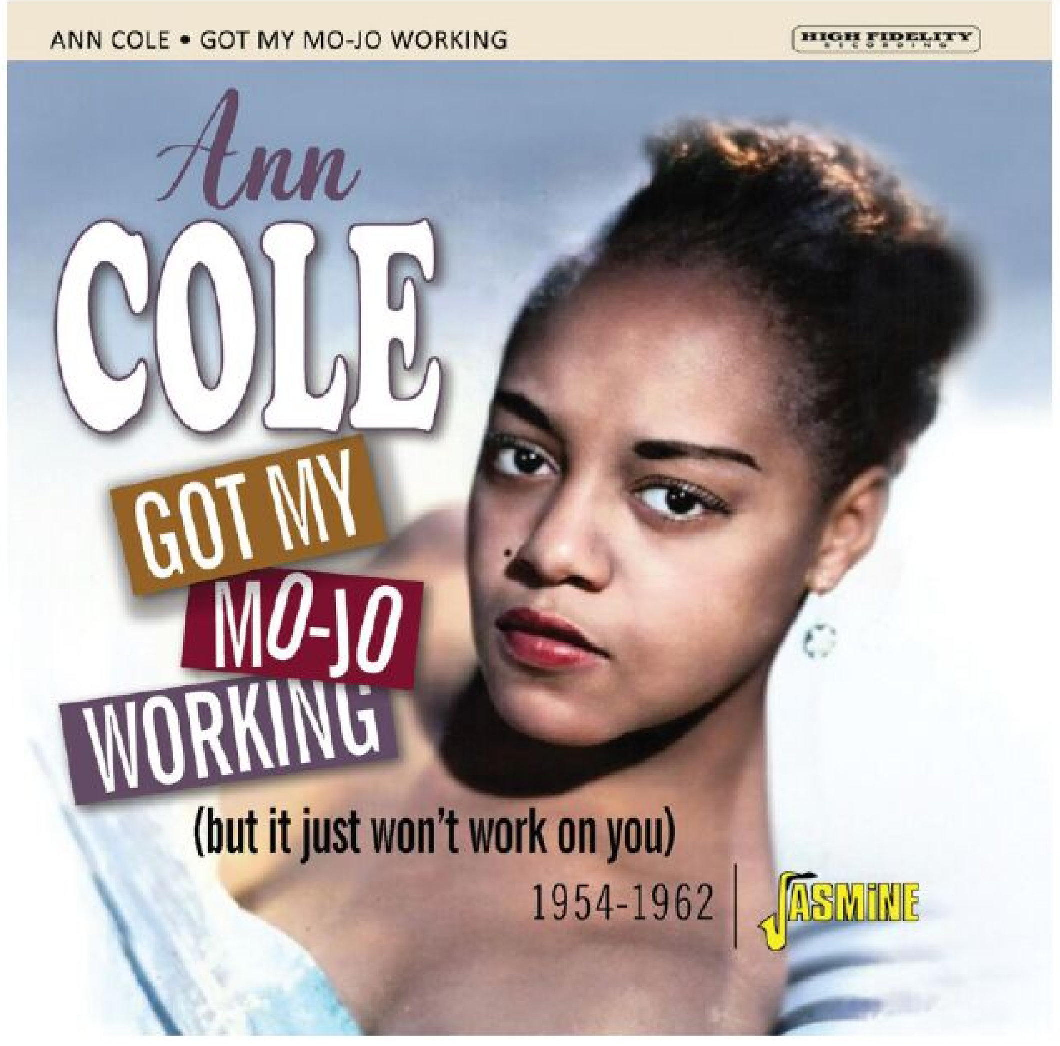
Southern root doctors would use this magical dust; a mixture of graveyard dirt, sulphur powder, rattlesnake skin, and powdered herbs to jinx an enemy.

The ingredient of Graveyard dirt is significant: It is documented that slaves used graveyard dirt to escape on the Underground Railroad by rubbing the dirt on the bottom of their feet to prevent slave catcher's dogs from tracking their scent. Former slave Ruby Tartt from Alabama described that there was a conjurer who could "Hoodoo the dogs."

The concept of Goofer Dust was derived from African foot-track magic, whereby one harms their victim through their feet. Ma Rainy refers to the dust in her song "Black Dust Blues" where she sings:
"I began to feel bad, worse than I ever before
I began to feel bad, worse than I ever before
Lord, I was out one morning, found black dust all round my door

I began to get thin, had trouble with my feet
I began to get thin, had trouble with my feet
Throwing dust about the house whenever I tried to eat
Black dust in my window,
black dust on my porch mat
Black dust in my window,
black dust on my porch mat
Black dust's got me walking on all fours like a cat"

To reverse the hex, the victim might attempt ritual bathing, floor washing, or sweeping to remove the dust. Sprinkling salt in the corners of the house is also a known goofer dust antidote.



One of my most favourite songs to reference hoodoo spells is the original recording of "I Got My Mojo Workin", written by Preston "Red" Foster and first recorded by RnB and Gospel artist Ann Cole. Released in 1956, Cole's rendition references a mixture of Hoodoo tradition and superstition including the lyric "I got Hoodoo ashes all around your bed." Ann Cole's vocal delivery on this track is just fantastic; emotive, upbeat and full of character. The following year, Muddy Waters released his version of "Got My Mojo Working," which became far more commercially successful and widely recognized. I love Muddy Waters, but I think Ann Cole's original version was the best – so be sure to look this record up if you haven't heard it!

Hoodoo traditions are woven into so many great blues songs. Drawing many parallels with the origins of Blues music, Hoodoo incorporates traditions from its roots in West and Central Africa, but was created by African-Americans in America. Here African spiritual traditions were fused with Native American botanical knowledge, European folklore and superstitions, and Christianity. Blues artists played an important role in bringing awareness of Hoodoo practices to the mainstream population.

LINTON FESTIVAL 2024

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Elsa-Wellamo

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Mark your calendars for July 5th to 7th, 2024, as the picturesque town of Ross-On-Wye prepares to host the beloved Linton Festival for its 22nd consecutive year. Organized by a dedicated team of volunteers, this annual event promises three days of unforgettable entertainment, all set against the charming backdrop of the Alma, a quintessential country pub.

Since its inception, the Linton Festival has remained committed to delivering an immersive musical experience while fostering a sense of community spirit. This year is no exception, with an exciting lineup featuring 14 bands spanning various genres, ensuring there's something for every musical palate.

One of the festival's highlights is its unwavering support for charitable causes. Over the years, the event has proudly raised over £100,000 for both national and local charities, exemplifying its dedication to making a positive impact beyond the realm of music.

Attendees can expect an array of local culinary delights, refreshing beers, and ciders to complement the vibrant atmosphere. Moreover, the festival provides ample camping space for those looking to fully immerse themselves in the experience, along with convenient free parking facilities.

Among the eagerly anticipated headline acts gracing the stage this year are the soulful sounds of Ruby Turner, the electrifying performances of Band of Friends, and the mesmerizing harmonies of Talon. Additionally, festival-goers can look forward to renowned favorites such as Wille & the Bandits, Erja Lyytinen, Chris Bevington, and Catfish, who will captivate audiences with their exceptional talent and infectious energy throughout the three-day event.

For those eager to join in the festivities or learn more about the lineup and schedule, detailed information is available on the official Linton Festival website at www.lintonfestival.org. Whether you're a seasoned blues aficionado or simply looking to indulge in a weekend of music, food, and camaraderie, Linton Festival 2024 promises an experience to remember.

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PANAMA BLUES

Are you seeking a diverse music festival amid winter set in a luxurious tropical paradise?

Laura Carbone

Look no further than the Panama Beaches Jazz and Blues Festival, an official national cultural event of Panama and produced by John Wolff.

After five years, this festival moved down from the mountains of Boquete. It resettled at the 5-star Buenaventura Golf and Beach Resort on the Panama Riviera with hundreds of acres of paradise, pools, beachfront, activities, and fine dining. The musical lineup is truly diverse and international, showcasing top talents from various corners of the world.

Top-of-the-line bluesman and Alligator artist Tommy Castro represented the US this year and has twice garnered the BB King Entertainer ofthe Year at the Blues Music Awards.

Deanna Bogart has been a recurrent festival favourite with her multi-talented blend of vocals, saxophone, keyboards, and sparkling personality. JP Soars and the RedHots, accompanied by Anne Harris on electric violin, gave a captivating Gypsy Jazz Revue experience with physical and musical bends that were"out of this world.

This year's Grammy nominee, Dwayne Dopsie and his Zydeco Hellraisers brought the Louisiana swamps to the shores, infusing the festival with infectious energy and rhythm.

Canada has long had strong ties with Panama and bought some of their finest musicians, led by JUNO winner, composer, and keyboardist Lance Anderson with his all-star band Matchedash Parish. Spinoffs from this supergroup included the uber-talented Matt Weidinger and Quisha Wint.
The BlackburnBrothers, one of the funkiest bands ever to arise north of the border, laid down an irresistible groove, causing a spontaneous audience to en-mass electric slide line dance in front of the stage.

International acts like Munich-based 'Muddy What?' and Panamanian ensemble, 'Making Movies,' further enrich the festival's global appeal, blending tradition with innovation while infusing the air with vibrant rhythms.

With its idyllic location, luxurious accommodations, and stellar line-up, the Panama Beaches Jazz and Blues Festival has undoubtedly earned its place on the blues bucket list, offering an unforgettable experience for music enthusiasts worldwide.

DISCOVER NEW MUSIC IN OUR BLUE BLOOD SECTION

BLUETONES 42

"Music was a big part of our life growing up." explains Bluetones 42's lead guitarist Stuart Scholes. "My dad had a great collection of vinyl records, and I remember being captivated by listening to artists such as Ry Cooder.

I vividly remember him coming home with a cd player too, and from then on, I could easily listen to old blues artists like John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters, as well as players such as Eric Clapton & Jimi Hendrix. I would sit there for hours, rewinding a few seconds at a time and working out what they were playing.

Then I'd plug in my guitar into an old reel-to-reel and try to recreate those sounds. Combining more than 50 years of musical experience between band members, Bluetones 42 are experienced musicians with a deep respect for their blues heritage. Listen to them play and you'll hear loud and clear the echoes of such guitar legends as Albert & B.B. King and Robert Johnson, while also noting nods to more contemporary blues players such as Joe Bonamassa, Josh Smith, and Mike Zito.

In addition, Bluetones 42 bring the energetic feel-good elements of early soul and R&B, with influences such as Stevie Wonder, Jimmy Nolen, and Steve Cropper. Whether playing melodic rhythmic lines or getting down and dirty with funky rhythms, guitarist Sam Ford loves seeing the audience respond to the groove.

"We enjoy playing funky stuff, it's great to see the audience moving and getting into it. That's what it's all about really. Incorporating a mix of influences including anything from soul, funk, rock, country and more, the group blend many different styles together to come up with an exciting, energetic sound that engages audiences of all ages.

Although a number of the band have been playing together for a number of years, the band in its current lineup is a recent proposition, having just added another member to the group in the form of singer and guitarist Jordan Rose of "In The Pines." The group are now working at getting together a revised catalogue of songs including both original music and covers of classic favourites.

On the heels of several performances at the Orkney Blues Festival in 2023, the band have just launched an Instagram page, and have plans to record and release some of their original songs online this year. Bluetones 42 are also taking bookings for the second half of 2024.

For further details see Instagram page- @bluetones42

LOUNGE LIZARDS

I have always been surrounded by music. My father used to sing with local dance bands in the 1940s and my uncles introduced me to Elvis Presley, Little Richard, Chuck Berry etc. in the mid to late 50s. I used to love visiting my grandma's house on a Saturday and playing all those wonderful rock and roll records.

My first guitar hero at this time was Hank Marvin and my first record was a Shadows EP. Red jackets and red guitars on the cover photo. The epitome of cool. Then came The Beatles and especially The Rolling Stones who ignited my lifeline passion for the Blues.

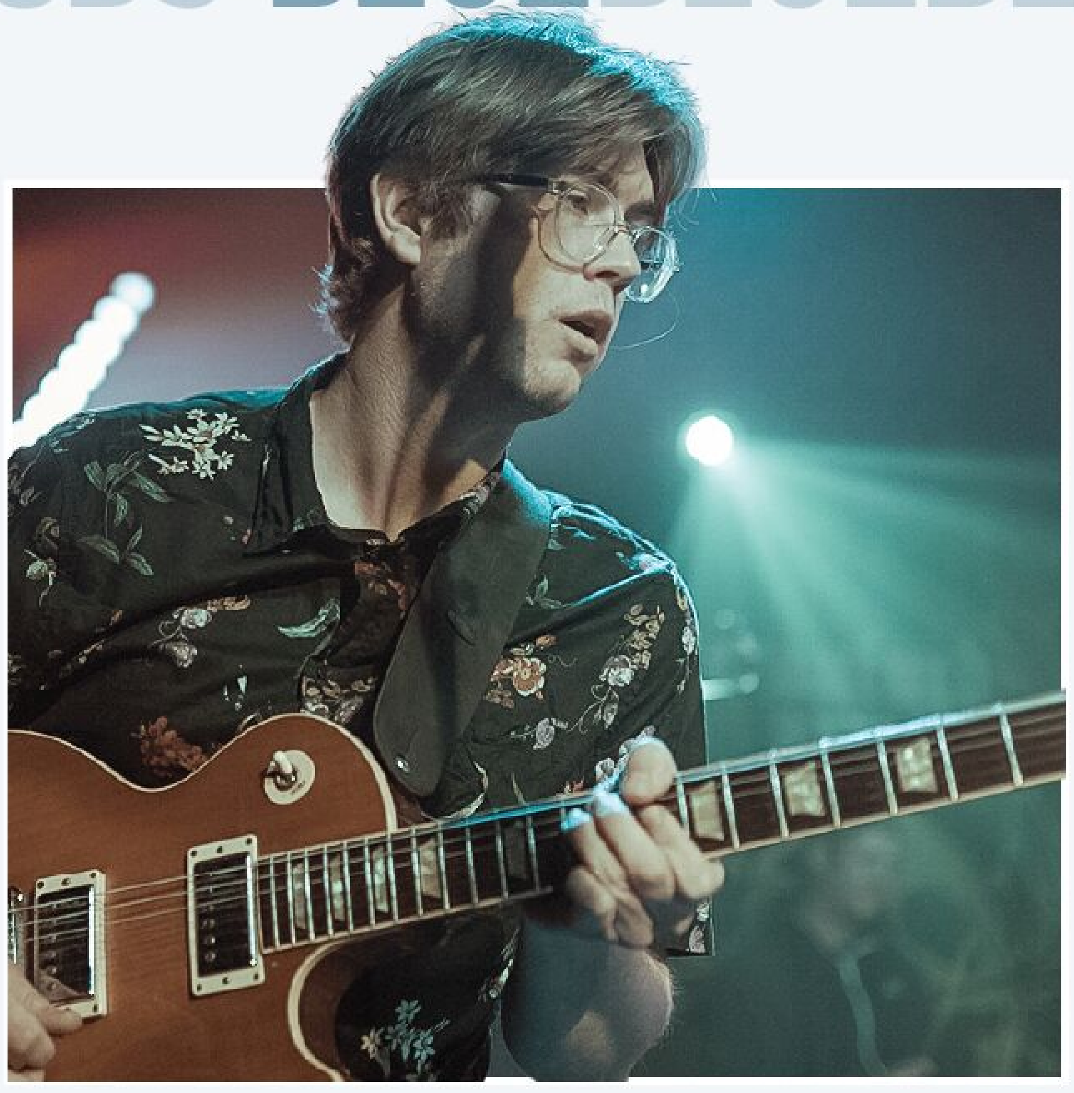
My first guitar was a very rough, home-made Spanish thing, given to me by my Godparent's lodger, to which he had neglected to fit frets, so the only chord I was able to play successfully was E. My father, keen to support my growing interest in the instrument, eventually bought me an electric guitar and amplifier from a cousin who had lost interest. This was a red Watkins Rapier 33 and Watkins Westminster amp.

Over time I became relatively proficient on the guitar and played with like-minded friends at school before joining my first real band, Saratoga, in 1969. I continued to play on and off around the North East pub and club scene in a variety of bands through the 70s and 80s until we started The Lounge Lizards around 1995. The current line-up of the band has been together for about 6 years and features Geoff Blanch on vocals and harmonica, a great front man and a superb harp player, Dom Hornsby, a great keyboard player, Dave Tomlinson on bass and Brian Ward on drums, a rock-solid rhythm section. All exceptional musicians.We are essentially a blues band and would prefer to concentrate our efforts in that genre, but Blues is a hard sell in the North East and we have had to incorporate a few 60s classics into the set to appeal to a wider audience.

We do quite well around the North East pub scene where our favourite gig is at The Tyne Bar in Newcastle, but there is a lot of talent in the North East and competition for gigs is intense. We have been invited to do the occasional local festival, most recently The Tyneside Americana and Blues Festival at the Crescent Club in Cullercoats, where the Blues Matters Magazine was closely involved. I think we would like more of these types of gigs.

Basically, we're just a little pub band from Newcastle, happy playing local gigs, and enjoying what we do although if the right offer came along? Who knows? *by Ron Seymour*

For further information: www.theloungelizardsuk.wix.com/thelounge-lizards



THE MAT DAY BAND

Mat Day had aspirations of becoming a professional skateboarder, until his dad gave him a Jimi Hendrix CD. "I had no specific interest in music, or any particular artist. But I loved this CD. I had a guitar, and thought, 'Maybe I can do that?"

His favourite was Red House. Using a tablature book, he learned how to play it note for note. "I had all those Hendrix licks, and I realised that, if I changed them around or mixed them up, it still sounded good." He began experimenting, and started listening to more music, watching YouTube, and quickly realised that his favourite song was, in fact, a blues song." It was clearly what I liked, so I became obsessed with finding out everything I could about blues. I'm like a complete nerd or hyper-fixate on things. I had to know everything about it. I read books, watched documentaries on how blues began, where it is now, and everything in between. "

He discovered the three Kings, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Stevie Ray Vaughan, etc. "I went on a huge Stevie Ray trip. He's more relatable in many ways than Hendrix; I mean, Hendrix is like from space. I was so captivated by how intense Stevie Ray's playing was. "He soon began to impress a friend's dad, local guitarist Cliff Brown. Cliff started taking Mat to jams, and offering pointers, notes, and suggestions on how to improve his playing.

"Lots of people would come up to me and say how fantastic I was. But then I'll get back in the car with Cliff, and, though he would never put me down, it was always, 'Yeah, that was cool. But work on this. Listen to this record. Work on your rhythm playing."

Cliff was an engineer at Blackstar Amplification, and before long, Mat was working there too. A colleague heard him playing and invited him to join his band. Soon, Mat was gigging around Birmingham and became familiar with the music of Steely Dan and Donald Fagen. "It opened my eyes to what I could add to blues, and how it could be expanded in different ways." This trajectory inevitably led to Robben Ford and Matt Schofield, both of whom reinforced his interest in jazz variations on a blues progression. Eventually, Mat met Greg Coulson at a blues jam in Northampton.

This began a musical association that would result in Mat joining the Greg Coulson Band. With Greg, Mat evolved into a fully-fledged blues guitarist. Although continually playing with Greg, Mat has embarked on his own project - The Mat Day Band. "I want to focus more on Chicago-style blues-soaked standards, and originals with a post-bop flavouring." The band's debut CD is due for release in April.

For further information, see johnfinnmusic.com and select Mat Day Band from the drop-down menu.

BAZ FIELDS AND THE DEBT COLLECTORS ROCK 'N' BLUES BAND

If you're in Glasgow you'll find a healthy pub music scene with a generous share of Rock and Blues acts. Since 2011 this includes 'The Debt Collectors Rock'n'Blues Band. Founded by lead guitarist/vocalist Baz Fields., who has been playing guitar for over 50 years, only taking up lead vocal duties in the past six or seven..

"Frankly, I was frustrated by the parade of lead vocalists who would come traipsing through the band leaving havoc in their wake. I have a theory about why vocalists can be the more difficult prima donna's in a band (closely followed by lead guitarists, I'll confess). Studies of brain activity as seen in CT and MRI scans show performing musicians' brain lighting up like a Xmas trees from all those fine motor movements, aural analysis, tempo, pitch , emotional interpretation etc. while a singer's brain ...well not quite so much. So I'm thinking vocalists see us players getting the buzz well on and react 'Hey shouldn't I be feeling as good after all I'm the frontman !?"'

And so, those of shallower character get moody and impossible to work with. So I bit the bullet and took over lead vocal duties having first 'paid my dues tae Rock'n'Blues.' with regular training from a proper vocals coach including months then years of diligent exercising. It is said once you've put ten thousand hours into any discipline you finally get on top of it. Some folk are gifted enough to open their mouths and music comes out but I did it the hard way and had to find my voice. Now I really enjoy exploring vocals for many styles and genres.

With the Debt Collectors we're focused on covering guitar driven Rock'n'Blues classics where I get to emulate my heroes such as Jimi Hendrix, Gary Moore, Peter Green , Jimmy Page and more. But I had another itch to scratch. I had written a handful of songs at various stages of completion so I used the Covid downtime to record a solo album, title of 'Long Time Coming" - not the most original title but an accurate description of my particular musical journey . I've never performed the album live so that's a goal for the future. Meanwhile the Debt Collectors have a full gig diary for 2024 regularly playing venues around Glasgow and Central Scotland.

"The Scotia Bar" for example is a Glasgow institution in terms of the performing arts with everything from poetry readings and folk jam nights to live bands, so we were most chuffed when the management team asked us to make our shows there a regular event. From now on, we'll be "pay'n our dues tae Rock'n'Blues" in regular monthly instalments there, on 1st monthly Saturday afternoons."

SUSAN SANTOS
SONARO

Colin Campbell   Juan Pérez-Fajardo

Hailing from the vibrant musical landscape of Madrid, Susan Santos emerges as a fervent force in the realm of guitar virtuosity. A self-taught maestro, she wields her instrument with the finesse of a seasoned veteran, crafting compositions that pulsate with her distinctive fusion of rhythm and texture.

As a left-handed guitarist, Santos defies convention, infusing her music with a refreshing originality that underscores her status as a true trailblazer in the contemporary music scene. In an exclusive interview for Blues Matters at her home in Madrid, the enigmatic, singer songwriter and multi-instrumentalist delves into the making of her latest album Sonaro, offering insight into her unique songwriting process and the eclectic blend of influences that shape her music. With her album poised to captivate audiences worldwide, the artist's multifaceted approach promises an exhilarating musical journey for fans old and new alike.

Initially we talk about her recent tour in Spain. She describes it as "both tiring yet fulfilling." Susan expressed gratitude "for being able to do what she loves, there's no pain when you do what you want." Despite initial plans for only one show in Madrid, the band ended up performing in other cities due to popular demand, marking a significant departure from when we last spoke during the pandemic, when touring was non-existent! "Audiences responded well to the new songs, which were unfamiliar to them."

Reflecting on the uniqueness of playing new material live before its official release, she highlights the positive reception from audiences as the "best response they've experienced compared to previous albums.

"Playing in Madrid, my hometown, always feels special because it's where my musical journey began. The energy and support from the audience is overwhelming, and it's a surreal feeling to see familiar faces in the crowd, I was surprised at the turnout, noting that playing midweek gigs in Madrid can be unusual due to people having work commitments the next day. However, the experience was memorable and marked a special start to the tour."

Reflecting on her experiences touring different countries, Susan shares anecdotes about playing in Mexico and France. Recalling her time in Mexico, she describes it as a mix of excitement and caution due to the country's reputation for violence: "It was a special experience because, for the first time, it was the first country where they speak the same language, Spanish. But on the other hand, it's a dangerous country."

A memorable incident during a festival in France was a particular point of interest. "One day in a festival in Ambon in the north of France, we decided to take a walk outside instead of driving to the city. It was a sunny day, but suddenly, it started raining, and we got lost near the highway. We couldn't communicate with the locals as none of us spoke French."

We went on to discuss how difficult it is for her to sing in a different language from her own Spanish: "For me, the world language, is THE MUSIC. But there is music that sounds so different if you change the language. I really prefer my music in English."

Discussing future projects, Susan hints at the possibility of releasing an acoustic or live album: "Even though I initially didn't consider it, many people have asked about an acoustic album. Maybe, it could be my next album. I want to do a live album with a few new songs, but it's essential to choose the right venue and ensure the authenticity of the performance," she adds.

We talk about the influence of Stevie Ray Vaughan on her choice in being a musician: "The first time I listened to him, I said, 'Wow. Who is this guy?'...It was something unique." When asked about keeping the blues alive for younger generations, she emphasises "the importance of blending classic blues with contemporary elements to appeal to modern listeners and the need for new generations to put their own spin on the genre while still respecting its roots.

Discussing the challenges of navigating the modern music industry, particularly in the age of digital streaming platforms, Susan acknowledges the necessity of being present on these platforms while also emphasising the enduring appeal of physical formats like vinyl and CD:. "I sold out my entire merchandise, including vinyl records, at live shows in the UK last year, it's a generational thing. People want to connect through our music." This underscores the significance of connecting with fans beyond just digital platforms, playing live is what she loves doing.

The conversation turns to the making of her latest album. Susan has taken a more direct role in producing compared to previous projects. "I wanted to take full control of the production process, wanting to ensure that the final product reflected our artistic vision authentically. Each song is a chapter in a larger story, creating a short film or short book atmosphere, with diverse styles, likening it to a soundtrack. I am very happy with the album's sound and production." Overall, there was a feeling that she felt empowered by the ability to make key decisions throughout the recording process. Detailing the collaborative process on the album, she highlighted the seamless dynamics within the band. "It was so easy because the musicians that played on the album, they are the bass player and the drummer that play with me always and they are great to play with, we put ideas to each other, then the music flows. We spent maybe three, four days recording initially. But we had a little problem with recording the album because when we finished the first part of the album, I returned to my home with one of my guitars and my banjo, and I had a car accident. We finished the mixing and mastering of the tracks last summer."

As the conversation shifts towards the technical aspects of her music, we discuss the unique sound produced by her baritone guitar:. "I think that the sound is so different because sometimes the baritone guitar is more useful to make only a riff than the normal guitar. But in live performance, I use the baritone guitar by fingerpicking, and I think that the sound is different."

When asked about the biggest difference between playing the baritone guitar and the Stratocaster, she highlights the lower sound and the mix between guitar and bass elements: "It's lower sound. It's more similar, you know, it's a mix between a guitar and a bass. So, you know, it's something between those sounds."

We consider motivation for continuing to play music and Susan expresses the importance of personal evolution and authenticity: "I think that for me, it's important to do something different between the new album and the other albums. It's not about the audience or the fans. I need to do something for me because musicians are always the eternal student and need to do something different."

As the interview ends Susan shares her hopes and fears for the album's reception, emphasising her excitement and uncertainty about its impact: "I'm really excited about this album, and I think that it's identified as my best album right at this moment. But you know, the release is on April 5th, and the audience, the new fans, need to say if they like it or not. We will be having the album launch in Finland at The Grand Blues Festival in Lahti."

With a mixture of anticipation and humility, the artist embraces the unpredictable nature of her musical journey, expressing gratitude for the opportunities to connect with audiences worldwide. As she prepares to embark on a new chapter with the album's release, she remains grounded in her passion for music and unwavering commitment to artistic growth.

Overall, the interview provides valuable insights into her creative process, and approach to navigating the music industry, and her commitment to keeping the blues alive while also exploring new musical territories.

Susan Santos' new album "Sonora" is released April 5th via www.susansantos.infoTop of Form

It's difficult to avoid puns with a band like this. Thoughts of stardom looming, new stars in the etc, just instantly spring to mind,and maybe with good reason. A UK outfit with a transatlantic/ international following, the Hanging Stars are certainly making waves with a brand of modern Americana that defies boundaries and holds echoes of 1960s pioneering psychedelic rockers like the Byrds and Grateful Dead.

Iain Patience Julian Hand

Catching up with frontman, singer-songwriter and guitarist Richard Olsen he confirms the seeming success of the band and their latest release, On a Golden Shore: "We thought it would be one for the fans really, then all of a sudden it seemed to resonate with a wider audience in a much wider way. That's obviously a good thing and I'm really, really happy about it.."

"We've done five albums, and every band starts with some sort of idea of what it's supposed to be. After five albums I felt that we'd got this confidence to be what we are. With that confidence comes a gift of chucking the rules out the window a bit! And so all of a sudden we think, well, we're just going to do what we do. Not that we've ever said in our careers that 'No, we can't do that cause we're supposed to be like this1' But at the same time with the confidence we now have, we think we can do whatever we want. At the studio in Helmsdale in Scotland, it was part of the plan – to travel with nothing and just use what they had there - incredible guitars, acoustic and electric, six and twelve strings, incredible keyboards, bass guitars, synths, compression boxes, EQs, microphones. So, we just wanted to use what was there for this album. So it was a huge part of the record, much more than the last one (Hollow Heart) which was also done there."

The band started with me, Paulie,(Cobra) the drummer, and Sam Ferman, the original bass player. It all came out of another band – somewhat traumatic in some ways – but we wanted to just start afresh and turn the volume down a bit. We ended up to our friend, Bob Campanella's in Las Angeles. He said all the way through, 'Come use my studio. You can use it for free. And that's how it all started, with the three of us," he explains about the band's origins which also included a few other members of a more transient nature.

The key thing about us, and for thi album – the original bass player, Sam (Ferman) left cause of other commitments, and Paul Milne took over that role. But even with changes, I feel we've always been a collective, a collective based on the love of music and friendship, and all that goes hand-in-hand. So, we've had personnel shifts but they feel natural and they feel like it's just how the world turns. We welcomed Paul Milne, a Scottish fellow who's in London a long time and played in a lot of bands. And that was a good injection for us.We also have Joe Harvey White doing pedal-steel, he's been another near-constant and Patrick Ralla's been a huge part of the band."

Olsen confirms the material is mostly his: "The writing comes mostly very much from me. But not in the way where I say, 'Look here's a song, do this that way or other!' There's no point being in a band where you do that, I reckon. The reason I play with these guys is because of their great talent and their musical gifts. It would be crazy, ridiculous not to use that. So, even thought I write the majority of the songs, Patrick Ralla also writes. So, I feel we have a very collaborative effort comes through in shaping the songs and putting it all together."

"WE'RE VERY HERE AND NOW"

Olsen reflects on influences by saying about the Byrds: "I think they actually shaped me. That wistful, chiming sadness and blissfulness – a sadful bliss – they kinda had something special. It runs right through me, it's like you tap into the God-Head with that chime and that ring. They're hugely influential maybe not so much as just a band but more as a sound and a vibe. They just tapped into a kind of vein of just goosebumps, for me personally."

"I love a sort of boleric thing, a rhythm that gives me goose-bumps. It doesn't matter where it comes from really, a few just have it. I've been in a lot of bands, doing this for a lot longer than I should! I came out of a band called the Stee Stee; a dysfunctional band - there's plenty on YouTube - sort of part Indy-Rock influences. That doesn't mean I'm saying the Hanging Stars is retro in any way. We may use traditional instruments but we never try to pretend that it's still 1967 or whenever, like that. That's not the point, we love a lot of that culture but that's a whole different thing. I feel that we're very here and now."

"The music, that's what is important. Not just where it comes from – it could like Lightnin' Hopkins, whoever. It's that pulse, the pulse is what makes it. Grateful Dead, that sounds hand-in-hand with that sort of boleric thing.

Aware that he has recently been working with a great, personal friend, Canadian-London musician, Bonnie Dobson, the lady behind Grateful Dead signature song, 'Morning Dew' - a song loved by Robert Plant, with whom she has recently shared a stage – I throw her name into the mix and get an instant, heartfelt response:"If you want a bit of a scoop, we've got pretty much an album ready that we've done with her. I'm really excited about that record. She said she wanted the Hanging Stars to back her and that's exactly what it sounds like – Bonnie Dobson backed by the Hanging Stars. It's so cool. I love it and I'm genuinely, genuinely so excited about it all."

With AMA award nominations and an ever-increasing, near-exploding, profile, the band and the new album are already climbing the AMA international charts, rocking the boat and making waves across continents. Bob Harris became a staunch Hanging Stars supporter early on. Olsen grins hugely at the surprising, to him, thought:

"That helped us enormously. I can't argue with it, but it sure helped us. It was just insane. Wonderful guy. The fact is here's this guy who's been sitting down and chatting with, like, Tom Petty, and John Lennon. Then he's saying that your band is one of his favourite groups! I mean, it's just such a huge compliment. That's been an absolute joy!".

THE
HANGING
STARS
FRESH SHORES

OUT OF LINE
THE WICKED LO-DOWN

Colin Campbell Duke Mulberry

Nick David, the charismatic lead singer, and harmonica virtuoso of the Wicked Lo-Down, stands at the forefront of a musical experience that transcends boundaries. With a voice that carries the raw emotion of blues and a harmonica mastery that weaves soulful narratives,

David is the heartbeat of the band with his fusion of gritty vocals and soul-stirring harmonica solos. Blues Matters caught up with Nick recently by telephone call, he was on his way to a routine Hospital appointment in Manchester, New Hampshire. We talked about many subjects including the band's new release, Out Of Line, his musical upbringing, and other topics.

In a candid conversation with Nick David, the journey into music began with a deep-rooted love for the art. Expressing the initial spark, he shared: "I just love music, you know? I just wanted to make music. I loved to sing, and I liked the reaction I would get out of people when I did it." The passion for music was cultivated during years spent immersed in listening, shaping a desire to create something powerful. The turning point came with the revelation sparked by the track Mannish Boy sung by Muddy Waters. Reflecting on the impact, he adds, "It hit me so powerfully. I wanted to make something like that. I want to make something that is that powerful." Though acknowledging the challenge, the aspiration to create such impactful music became a driving force for him.

Delving into the choice of blues, Nick attributed it to the rich musical influence from both parents. Growing up surrounded by blues, soul, R&B, and more, he reminisced about exploring records from the collections of James Cotton, Aretha Franklin, Muddy Waters, and others. The decision to pursue blues was shaped by this exposure, with the artist emphasising, "Both my parents had a really strong musical palate. It led me down the path to explore deeper." The journey took a detour into rock and heavy metal bands during adolescence, but a pivotal moment occurred when a friend's dad, a well-known local blues player, recognised Nick's vocal suitability for the blues genre. Encouraged to explore this genre, the artist embraced it, leading to the formation of a blues-influenced rock band. As the conversation shifted to Nick's musical evolution, he reflected on playing in various bands and participating in blues jams. A significant breakthrough occurred when joining a band heavily focused on blues, marking a dedicated commitment to the genre.

Describing his current musical endeavour,The Wicked Lo Down, he described his band as a "heavily blues influenced, all original rock and roll band.

" While acknowledging their deep connection to blues, they were careful not to categorise their music solely as blues, recognising its unique blend with rock and roll. The discussion naturally transitioned to the eagerly awaited new album. Nick expressed genuine excitement, considering it a worthy follow-up to their first record. The album is a testament to their creative journey, embracing blues influences while carving out a distinct space in the rock

and roll landscape. "The album stands as a testament to their artistic growth, blending the roots of blues with the dynamic energy of rock and roll." Nick, shed light on the formation of The Wicked Lo-down, revealing that the collaboration with Paul Size began around 15 to 16 years ago. The band's inception and the decision to record were influenced by the creation of compelling songs. However, the pandemic halted progress until a later studio session and a gradual buildup of the band's repertoire. "The logistical challenges of living in different parts of New England added a layer of complexity to their journey, which they navigated by meeting at Jeff Berg's house for rehearsals and creative sessions."

Explaining the choice behind Britney Spears' Toxic, which features on the new album, Nick shares a humorous anecdote: "I heard it, and I was hearing the changes in the song, and the changes are really good. They're really dark and brooding. It's all in a minor key. I started thinking about what it would sound like if that song were reimagined as more of a blues-rock and roll." Describing the band's initial reaction, the musician revealed, "When I brought it to the band, they were like, 'What the fuck? What are you talking about?' And I'm like, 'Man, listen, I hear this.'" The vision was to infuse the track with a Stevie Ray Vaughan-esque Texas blues feel, a departure from the pop original. The collaboration with bandmate Paul Size brought the vision to life, resulting in a unique and intriguing rendition of the song. Reflecting on the potential impact, the artist expressed hope that the cover would attract listeners outside the blues world and draw them into the band's original music. The cover serves as a deliberate departure, a fusion of incongruent elements that blend into a cohesive and brilliant musical experience. Shifting the focus to another track, The Wildest One, this is a tribute to the late Lester Butler. "Paul Size wrote this, he was hearing the lyrics in his head. That's something Lester would really dig into." The song weaves references to Butler's discography, honouring his legacy in the blues world. Discussing the production process, the musician clarified that while all basic tracks were recorded live, there were subsequent overdubs and refinements. The studio, located at bandmate Jeff Berg's house, provided the flexibility to add layers and nuances, ensuring a well-crafted final product. Nick acknowledged the role of Berg as the engineer, managing both playing and technical aspects during the recording process.

There's a famous vocal coach here on the East Coast named Mark Baxter... He wrote a book called the Rock and Roll Singers Survival Manual." The acknowledgement of occasional sessions with Baxter, both in New England and other locations, provided insight into his approach to vocal training

We chat about musical influences. He reiterates his roots are in the blues style, citing iconic figures: "You know, most of my influences are in the blues world... for blues players, I'd say the big ones are probably Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. Junior Wells was a huge influence. Hell yeah." He mentioned his band the Hoodoo Men, a project with Mike Welch and their tribute to the "Hoodoo Man Blues" record that displayed a deep connection to the blues genre. Highlighting modern influences, the musician expressed admiration for Robert Cray, especially due to a childhood memory of seeing him perform in their living room: "One of the first live concerts I ever got to see was Robert Cray playing in my living room." Curtis Salgado, associated with Cray's band in its early days, played a significant role in the artist's harmonica techniques, teaching him the art of tongue blocking during a hotel encounter. When asked about the best advice received in his musical career, he also mentioned Curtis Salgado, emphasising the importance of practice; "Practice, practice, practice. That's what my dear friend Curtis Salgado says to me every time we talk! "Acknowledging the adoption of various techniques from other musicians, he quipped about his learning process, mentioning, "I am, uh, I'm an on-the-job student."

If not a musical path, what would Nick be doing now? "If suddenly I couldn't sing or play, I would just fall back on putting shows together... I would probably do it somewhere in the entertainment business, there would be music involved somewhere. "Discussing his role as a promoter, he disclosed his initial motivation: "Like, I would book shows so I could be on them with the likes of Sugar Ray Norcia, Jerry Portnoy and Duke Robillard... I could pay everybody well, and everybody would go home happy, and then I would get to be on shows with some of my heroes."

The conversation touched on Nick's affinity to play both intimate venues and festivals, with a preference for the latter due to the freedom of movement on a bigger stage. However, he acknowledged the unique charm of intimate settings, where he can "sweat on people" and share an intimate musical experience with the audience.

Explaining his choice of the harmonica, he stated its initial introduction by his father and the instrument's forgiving nature for a beginner. Nick revealed, "I just started farting around with it," describing how it became an integral part of their musical journey, especially during his time with the band Chicken Head.

In a conversation about the band's collaboration with Mike Zito, the musician revealed their introduction to Zito through the New England Winter Blues festival, sharing, "I do this New England Winter Blues festival every year... last year, I hired Zito to come do the festival with us and tour." The strategic inclusion of their band in the lineup provided an opportunity to impress Zito, leading to a collaboration. Detailing the moment Zito expressed interest in working together, he recalled, "On the night of the last show, he's like, 'Man, I really like your band a lot. I'd love to do something with you.'" The excitement of the collaboration was palpable, with the musician describing the backstage moment as filled with suppressed screams of joy, so they signed with Gulf Coast Records.

We talk about his local music scene and how that musical landscape has changed over the years. Nick is very honest in his response. "I'm in New England, which is Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts. Out of those states, I've played mostly in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. There's something in the water here in New England because we had so many great musicians like Ronnie Earl, Duke Robillard, Sugar Ray Norcia, and Magic Dick. We have an embarrassment of riches, a glut of blues players. 30 years ago, people would clamour over themselves, but now, with everything accessible in our pocket, people lack reverence for live music. America's Got Talent offers quick fame without years of toil, changing the musical landscape to be electronic based."

We discuss the need to keep blues alive and relevant at length. Nick's feelings are philosophical. He adds "In 20 years, we're not going to have an audience. If we don't introduce this music to a younger generation quickly, there won't be an audience, and it'll go, you know, I don't know. The music's never going to die. I don't ever foresee that. But I don't want to see it relegated to the level of novelty. It's a very worrying thing, the future of the blues, especially. It's just such a small pond, such a niche. There are some young people at festivals and shows, but not enough to sustain the genre. If there aren't younger people playing and listening, I don't know what it will fizzle down into. It's all cyclical, it evolves, but it'll be in different genres, different feelings. It just depends."

For further information see website: www.wickedld.com

JJ GREY : ON THE ROAD AGAIN

Andy Hughes   Tom Britt

Blues veteran JJ Grey and his sterling band Mofro are returning after a long delay with a wonderful new album, and a tour that is likely to go on for a considerable time. The band is now an impressive size, and as he relaxes at his home in Florida just before the start of his US tour, JJ is happy to talk about his extended musical family.

"We have eleven musicians now; it has been a four piece and five-piece band at various times. I love a huge sound and I love horns, and all that stuff. We have two lady singers, a percussionist, I play guitar, not as well as the other guy in the band, drums, keys, sax, and horns, it makes a great sound and I love it."

There is a phrase that applies to authors, but works just as well for musicians – write what you know. "Yeah, and I wish someone had told me that a long time ago!" responds JJ with a laugh. "Some people are just really good at performing, period. They can get up on stage dressed like a rhinoceros, and you believe that they are a rhinoceros. And growing up I thought I was that zany kid who could do anything, and people would believe what I was trying to be. I think you do when you are growing up, it's part of that. And eventually I figured out that its best to just let the song do its thing, and dial the rest back to the basics, let the music shine through. A friend of mine said, 'everyone can be a character, if they have enough room to be one'. I think he was talking about people who live out in the country, because they do have enough room to be a character. I have lived in the country and the city, and I know you can take the character you learn in the country, and take it into the city with you, and just let the songs come to you through your character, just let yourself do it."

Checking out the 'influences' list, JJ Grey's artists of note reflect the diverse musicians that can be heard in the music he makes with his band, from Lynyrd Skynyrd to Muddy Waters, not often names you see on the same list.

"To me, they are all kids from the same parents. Anyone who has brothers and sisters knows,

> *"When everything lines up, it's a wonderful thing"*

you come from the same parents, but you are all different as characters and personalities. And I think music is the same. Southern music has influences from Soul, Funk, Rhythm And Blues, R 'N' B, Country Blues, Delta Blues, Old-Style Country, and to me they are all part of the same pot. The older I get, the less I care on what labels are on things, I'm just listening for the intent they use to deliver it, that's what matters to me."

Even though JJ and the band love being on the road, there has been a long lay-off, which is finally coming to an end. But there is considered thinking behind the absence of JJ and his friends from the list of touring attractions, as he explains.

"Well, we haven't been out much at all in the last two or three years. I think we were enjoying the calm before the storm, because I knew this new record was coming out. And I wanted to be off the road long enough to feel ready to go back. Not so long that it's out of your bloodstream, but it's faint enough that you hit a re-set button. So, this time around we are going to be hitting the road in a few days, and then we have a big long tour here in the US, then we are over to Europe for a couple of days, just in and out, and then maybe come back and tour Europe properly later on in the year."

What about songwriting JJ, how does that work for you?, I ask: "Like lots of people, I have bits of stuff on portable recorders all over the place. A melody idea pops up out of nowhere, it comes and I hum something, and record it on phone recorder. I've probably got five albums worth of song ideas on those things! I need reminders to make me go back and check things out, but then I'd need reminders for the reminders!"

"To me, writing a song is a conversation, I have no idea what I'm going to say until I say it. Then, depending on what comes next, will influence the way the next part goes, and that's how the whole things rolls along. I know if I try and

think too much about what I am trying to write about, it will turn out to be really awful, so I have learned over the years to just relax and go along with whatever comes to me. That's the best way to write songs, for me anyway, everyone has their own ways that suit them. It's an individual thing."

Any musician has at least one favourite song from their new album that they are looking forward to playing to their audiences on tour. "I got about seven!" confirms JJ laughing. "I really like Olustree and Deeper Than Belief because they are two extremes of the sense of what we do. I think you can only tell a band is really rocking, if sometimes they stop rocking, and everyone takes a breath. I love that contrast in a live show."

Because you are so much about being a live band, how do you feel about live albums?:

"It's a strange thing. You can be looking out on the most beautiful sunset you've ever seen, and you take a picture of it, and when you get home, it's nothing like what you felt when you were there taking the picture. Live albums are like that. When everything lines up, the band, the sound, the audience, the atmosphere, it's a wonderful thing, and if you can capture that on a live recording, that's something great to have. But it is about being there, that's what does it for me. That's why I do what I do. I just love being there."

THE LOVE YOU BLEED
DANIELLE NICOLE

Colin Campbell Missy Falkner

With a voice that effortlessly traverses the realms of soul, blues, and rock, Danielle Nicole emerges as a commanding presence in the contemporary music scene.

Hailing from Kansas City, Missouri, this powerhouse vocalist, and bassist has captivated audiences worldwide with her electrifying performances and raw, emotive lyricism. Formerly a member of the acclaimed sibling trio, Trampled Under Foot, Danielle's solo career has soared to new heights, highlighting her unparalleled talent and unyielding passion for music. As she continues to forge her path with a fearless determination, Blues Matters got the chance to talk about various subjects including home life and her stunning new release, The Love You Bleed

Danielle explains her background: "Growing up, I was exposed to a diverse range of music thanks to my parents' eclectic taste. Soul, blues, and rock were always playing in our household, so they became ingrained in my musical DNA. These genres speak to me on a deeply personal level because they're rooted in emotion and storytelling. Soul music has this raw, visceral quality that I've always been drawn to. Blues, on the other hand, speaks to the struggles and triumphs of the human experience in a way that resonates with me deeply. Rock adds that edge and energy that fuels my performances. So, when I create music, I draw from these influences to craft songs that are authentic and speak to the soul."

"We work hard to make sure that we have time at home to be with the family. The boys are getting a little older now. They're into baseball, martial arts, and school, so it's essential that they keep their routines. When we're on the road, we work hard, and when we're home, we separate the two aspects of our lives. Family always comes first; they understand that if there's an emergency, I'll cancel any show and be on the first flight home. Technology helps a lot; being able to FaceTime them and hear their voices makes a huge difference. They enjoy going to shows and being a part of the music scene. I would love for them to be involved in music and art in some way, if they're doing what they love. Achieving more

at a younger age and valuing hard work and education while maintaining a good quality of life is what I aim to instill in them. I can't think of any other profession where I can take my boys to Mexico or Canada. It's important for me to show them the reality of the world, especially beyond the bubble their school or social media keeps them in. They get to see people connecting through music despite language barriers, and that's a priceless lesson."

Her influences mirror many: "My dad had a massive record collection, so it was Everly Brothers to Zappa to Beatles to Muddy Waters, to Etta James. It was cool being exposed to all of that because it gave me such a wide range of influences. But I also grew up in a time where we had Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston, and Stevie Wonder at his prime, so just incredible artists and vocalists. I enjoyed the pop side and the legacy music as well. It was a weird time for music, but I was thankful to have both older and contemporary influences. Whitney and Mariah, singing gospel over pop changes, were particularly influential because they blended those genres so seamlessly, they were big influences on me at that time. I remember being mesmerised by the soundtrack of 'The Bodyguard' when it came out. But I also loved the 'Funny Girl' soundtrack by Barbra Streisand and even Celine Dion. So, I have a lot of pop references in my inspiration. I think that's why my music now reaches out beyond traditional blues. While my roots are deeply in blues, being influenced by musicals, pop, country, R&B, has allowed me to branch out musically and explore different sounds. Brandon [Miller] also brought a lot of that to the table in the melodic writings of our songs together, allowing us to think outside the box and incorporate diverse influences into our music."

"My mom still sings occasionally. She considers herself retired, but she had a great voice. She taught me how to harmonise and how to listen to the music. My dad taught me the fundamentals of leading a band and knowing what you need to know to not be talked down to as a 'chick singer.' He instilled a streetwise etiquette, so I would be respected as a musician and not just someone who doesn't know what key they're singing in or how to count off a song. I took dance lessons for many years competitively in my youth, so I've never really had to deal with much stage fright. That helped me be vulnerable and let loose, putting myself into my music and shows. When we're on stage, conveying our music, the truth is all that matters, and the story is what matters. To tell the story, you must be vulnerable. It's about making a connection with the crowd, knowing that people can connect and relate, maybe making them think harder or helping them get through something. If you're not making that connection and really going there, they're not going to either. What's the point of all this hard work if we're not going to make something meaningful out of it!"

"It's still a challenge, but it's getting easier with time. In the beginning, it was tough; there were times where I didn't know how I would manage. When playing bass, the vocals verbally tell the story, while the music supports it without getting in the way. So, the basslines and the vocals often contradict each other, making it a constant struggle. I practiced relentlessly - running baselines, shuffles, swing, slow blues -over and over for months. Then, I had to push myself to perform in public, and yes, I bombed quite a few times. But you must get past that. Putting yourself out there is crucial; you'll only get so far practicing alone in your apartment! It's all about that bass, but as the bass player, I also have to connect with the drummer because we are telling that part of the story together. We're the binding of the book, keeping the pages from flying out when you're reading. I'm having a conversation with the drummer while I'm fronting, relating with the crowd, and telling the story as well. It's exhausting, but worth it."

"This spring, we've had some sporadic festivals pop up, making the touring on and off, which is more exhausting. I prefer to go out for longer stretches, like 12 or 13 shows in 13 days, then have a break at home for ten days before heading out again. That rhythm works better for me mentally. It also works better for the boys; they're not back and forth as much. But sometimes we have to go where the music takes us, and it doesn't always line up. That's part of the sacrifice."

"blues is the creation of American music"

"When my brothers and I were forming our band, Nick already played guitar, and Chris already played drums. We were deciding if we wanted to keep it strictly a family band or hire someone. I offered to learn the bass, thinking, "Why not?" So, I took some fundamental lessons in theory and basslines, and it was a lot of trial and error. It didn't call to me like guitars often do when people see someone like Stevie Ray Vaughan play. It provided a fresh experience and added to my resolve to learn."

"During my parents' rehearsals, my dad noticed and encouraged me to join them. Then, when I saw Etta James live at 15, I was inspired. That's when I knew I wanted to sing, perform, and follow music. So, I pursued singing until I was nineteen when I started learning to play bass guitar. When I started playing music full time with The Danielle Nicole Band, I began singing more and with Trampled Under Foot, I split the vocals with Nick, so I only sang half the show. When I knew, I was going to sing full time, I went to a vocal coach in Kansas City just to learn some basic warm-ups and tips to help maintain stamina. I took four lessons and still use those tips to help when I feel strained on stage. I haven't had any formal training per se. I try to be as much like myself as I can on stage. Certain stories call for different personalities to come out, and I enjoy immersing myself in the story of each song. I see every performance as an opportunity to effectively tell a story, regardless of what's going on in my personal life behind the scenes. But I'm also very real in between songs, talking to the crowd. I don't feel like I'm super different on and off stage, but I am an entertainer at the end of the day."

"It's been a little easier than when I first started out. I think the misogyny is still there, but the behaviour isn't as outward. Maybe, dudes are finally realising there are consequences now, and women don't have to put up with that kind of behaviour or talk. There used to be a lot of long hugs or hands where they shouldn't be. I'm not sure if it's because I'm not twenty-three anymore, but I hope the younger generation of girls has to deal with less of that. When I felt uncomfortable, there were times I just laughed it off, but there were occasions when I had to put my foot down and say, 'No, this is not okay.' I was in a unique position touring with my two older brothers throughout my twenties and early thirties, so I always felt safe. That gave me an 'I ain't taking no crap' attitude, which I think was known pretty quickly. So, I didn't get messed with as much. However, there were occasions when I felt uncomfortable, and I just laughed them off, but I was cautious not to put myself in danger."

And where does inspiration come from these days?: "Yeah, it's inspirationally driven for me. Sometimes it's a bass line, like with Fool's Gold, where the music sets the mood for a swampy, dark song. Other times, it's a lyric, like Young Love on the Hill. Love On My Brain, was groove-driven, while How Do We Get To Goodbye was lyrically based. He Thinks I Still Care, a country gospel tune, stemmed from personal experience, reflecting an emotionally charged moment. Make Love started with a catchy chorus and groove, exploring the decision to choose love in any situation."

I have no fears because it's honest! Life shaped it, from self-esteem struggles to Covid and losing my brother. Releasing it brought closure. The fear; will people relate or reject it? My hope is, to show the blues' power, its place in American music, and inspire the youth. My hopes are for the album are to reach a younger crowd and help the youth to realise that the blues is hip, and the blues is the creation of American music."

For further information:
daniellenicolemusic.com

AN INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN EARP OF BIG WOLF BAND

REBEL'S JOURNEY

Colin Campbell Richard Bell

Jonathan Earp, the lead singer, and virtuoso guitarist of Big Wolf Band, stands as a luminary figure in the realm of contemporary blues-rock.

His musical journey is a testament to a lifelong dedication to the craft, and as the spokesperson for Big Wolf Band, he channels that passion into an electrifying stage presence. With a voice that echoes the blues legends of the past and a guitar prowess that speaks volumes, Earp is the driving force behind the band's unmistakable sound. His artistry is showcased prominently in the band's newest release, Rebel's Journey, which continues to carve a distinct path in the ever-evolving landscape of blues-infused rock music. We chatted about Jonathan's musical odyssey, exploring his musical background, the influences, challenges, and triumphs that have shaped him into the captivating frontman leading Big Wolf Band's charge into the future of blues.

Jonathan's journey into music is rooted in a fatherly challenge, as he remembers: "My dad had an old Spanish guitar with about four rusty strings on it. When I was young, I used to mess about on it when I was ten, I wanted a guitar, and he says, well, if you can play me a recognisable tune on this guitar... I bought you a new acoustic." This initial spark led to years of dedication and practice, as Jonathan navigated the challenges of learning without the wealth of online resources available today to upcoming musicians. His musical lineage adds depth to his story, with a father who was a bass player in the '70s and a drummer brother. Nights spent making a racket at Rich Bitch Studios in Birmingham in his teens marked the era when they thought they were the "best thing since sliced bread. "Life, however, led Jonathan to temporarily set aside his musical

pursuits for about 11 years while raising a family. The loss of a friend in 2009 and the persistent encouragement from a work colleague reignited his passion. The turning point occurred in 2011-2012, marking the beginning of his active engagement in music again.

Reflecting on his influences, Jonathan cites legends like Peter Green, Jimi Hendrix, Paul Kossoff, and Eric Clapton, alongside contemporary artists such as Joe Bonamassa, Kirk Fletcher, and Josh Smith. His style, a fusion of blues rock with a touch of individuality, is described as something that flows, "straight from the heart to the fingers right in the moment."

The conversation delves into his early on-stage experiences, recalling nervously playing covers at iconic venues like The Flapper and Firkin in Birmingham. Despite nerves still surfacing before performances, Jonathan acknowledges the adrenaline and anxiety, emphasising that "it makes me feel alive."

As the discussion moves onto to his vocal prowess, Jonathan modestly downplays himself as a vocalist, expressing a focus on guitar. However, the evolution of his voice over the past five years, strengthened by advice from fellow musicians and producers, shines through in the recently released album.

The album's production process was explored, highlighting a longer timeline and collaborative efforts that resulted in a satisfying creative journey. One particular track, Standing In The Rain, almost didn't make it, saved only by persistent nudging from those who believed in its potential. The song captures moments of reflection on life's challenges and the healing power of music. A very personal song. The album, a culmination of songs dating back to 2011, reflects a journey filled with personal and health battles. Empire and Prayer, first track on the album, was initially mapped out but lacked lyrics. Inspired by road journeys to gigs and the camaraderie of band members, the lyrics took shape in a collaborative effort. Jonathan shares the humorous struggle, stating, "I think I've just used the lyrics out of a Rush song. So typical."

The collaborative spirit extends to other tracks, like Got Me Reeling, a lively song born from the fusion of Jonathan's bluesy vibes and Justin Johnson his co-writer and rhythm guitarist's optimism. Justin's dream-inspired lyrics added a unique touch, highlighting a shift from Jonathan's usual role as the main songwriter. Themes of mental health issues, come to the forefront in tracks like Living on Borrowed Time, addressing the experience of living with depression. Jonathan shared "That while it's a dark song, the music adds a lift, offering a cathartic release for both the artist and the audience." Jonathan candidly discussed the emotional depth of songs, highlighting the difficulty of singing tracks like Darkest Days "Difficult to sing due to the lyrical content, but when I get onstage, I just get into that zone and give my all." The track Crazy Love stood the test of time, waiting for the right lineup to bring its complexity to life. "The album would not be made had it not been for the generosity of fans who contributed to a crowdfunding project: so a huge thank you to you all".

Throughout the conversation, Jonathan's humility and dedication to continuous learning emerges as key themes. His story embodies the ebb and flow of a musician's life, shaped by challenges, losses, and the unwavering passion that keeps the music alive. Jonathan opened up about his creative process, revealing a treasure trove of ideas cultivated over the years. He advises, "Never throw an idea away because you don't know what you will use." Living with a connective tissue disorder called Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, Jonathan reflects on the impact of physical health on his musical journey This condition doesn't deter him; instead, "it becomes a driving force, pushing him to defy limitations and inspire others facing similar struggles.

"The loss of the ability to play pain-free during early tours due to shoulder issues and ongoing battles with chronic fatigue are part of his narrative. The album serves as a testament to resilience, managing, and adapting to the challenges presented by his health. Jonathan emphasises the importance of "music being a healer," acknowledging the impact of his journey on the creative process. Jonathan highlighted the cathartic aspect of music, describing it as a tool to "exorcise demons." He talked about having moments of self-doubt, the challenges of navigating the music industry, and the ultimate reward of connecting with music lovers in general. Jonathan's passion for music, resilience, and dedication shine through, making his journey a testament to the transformative power of the blues.

Big Wolf Band's distinctive sound, marked by the addition of keys and Hammond organ, evolved through different band lineups over the years. Jonathan reflects on the journey from a power trio to a more nuanced, soulful sound. He discussed the impact of live performance, stating: "The keys, the drums, the bass, the guitars, and obviously having Justin on second guitar and vocals, it could be a big old sound:

"Big Wolf Band has undergone a remarkable evolution, sculpting a distinctive sound over the years. The journey began with a power trio but lead guitarist Jonathan Earp felt a creative emptiness. He experimented with a funky route and various lineups; the breakthrough came unexpectedly during a gig at Route 44 in Birmingham. With the usual lineup unavailable, a makeshift ensemble, including a surprise keys player, produced a rough and ready performance that perfectly resonated with Earp's vision.

The addition of keys, Hammond, bass, and second guitar created a unique blend, breaking free from traditional blues constraints. Earp's sonic exploration expanded the band's repertoire beyond blues, infusing elements of rock and ballads. The dynamic sound features intricate songwriting, chord changes, and a mix of genres.

As the discussion turns to the forthcoming European tour, the first in the band's history; Jonathan expresses excitement and anxiety, reiterating the challenges posed by health issues. He acknowledges the significance of playing in Europe and "hopes that the audience enjoys our music."

We talk about the band's distinctive sound, their experiences performing at various venues, and the importance of connecting with the audience. Jonathan shares the significance of not giving up in the music industry and the valuable advice to "carve your own path" and "believe in yourself."

The interview concludes with a reflection on the transformative power of blues music, with Jonathan stating that blues allows him to express his emotions and connect with people in a unique way. The hopes for the album are grounded in the desire for people to enjoy the music, while Jonathan maintains a realistic and honest outlook on the industry. The trilogy concept, starting with A Rebel Story, reveals a narrative thread, taking listeners on a musical journey with Big Wolf Band.

Despite potential mishaps during recording, like technical glitches and surprise vocal prompts, the studio sessions turned out even better than expected.

Earp's dedication to music goes beyond the stage, delving into the challenges of managing a rare physical condition called Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS).

Reflecting on the impact of their first album, 'Dark Days,' Earp acknowledges the global reach of their music. Fans from unexpected places like Peru and Colombia have reached out, sharing how the music touched their lives. These connections, coupled with messages of how the music saved lives during dark times, leave Earp humbled and grateful.

Success, for Earp, is not just measured in traditional metrics but in the ability to record, release music, and connect with audiences worldwide. Looking to the future, he envisions more albums, a completed trilogy, and a continuous progression.

Despite challenges in the UK blues scene and the need to attract younger audiences, Big Wolf Band stands as a testament to breaking genre stereotypes and fostering a connection that transcends boundaries. The band's commitment to authenticity, storytelling, and musical innovation positions them as trailblazers in the evolving landscape of blues and rock.

Big Wolf Band's new album "Rebel's Journey" is released 19th April www.bigwolfband.com/shop

GRANDADDY
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PIE RECORDS
THE STROKES IS THIS IT

RHYTHM AND BLUES MATTERS

✎ Steve Harrison

📷 Rob Blackham & Supplied

Tomás Doncker lives in Brooklyn, New York, where he is CEO of True Groove Records and leader of The True Groove All-Stars.

The True Groove All-Stars include artists from many genres, but their main focus can be labeled Global Soul. This incorporates, Blues, Soul, Funk, and Jazz, all close bedfellows.

I've been lucky enough to catch these guys twice in a live setting, it is a magnificent event and a feeling of togetherness through the power of music. The band is currently playing dates in the UK, which allowed an opportunity to catch up and see what is next on the horizon for him and the band.

"I have some great news for you straight off the bat, We've been invited to play at the High Tide Festival later this year, it's such an honour for us, it really means so much to us all," he says with a burst of clear pleasure. The High Tide Festival, for those who are not familiar with it, aims to recapture the spirit of Eel Pie Island, in the heart of Twickenham. " I didn't know the specifics of the situation, and you know that I'm a vinyl junkie. I was just browsing a few record shops, and I saw Eel Pie Records, I was vaguely aware of the connection, the Eel Pie Studios. So I got chatting with the two guys in the record shop, man they were so knowledgeable about everything, then they took me outside to the back and said, that's where Howlin' Wolf played when he came to England, literally 30ft outside of the backdoor."

The True Groove All-Stars have established themselves firmly in the UK, and Europe over the past couple of years, especially in Scandinavia where Blues music has a huge following for many years. As I attested to earlier, this band of musicians crosses many genres, but as silly as it sounds, it's all coming from the same place. Back in New York, the record label part of the business supports many artists, some of whom have been featured in Blues Matters Magazine.

"This is a bit of a stripped-down trip this time around, we have Johnatan Reid on horns, he's an All-Star, he plays bass as well as horns, and Mark Henry, Mark is going to be playing everything, keyboards, saxophone, just everything, he's so

LEROY "LEFTY" THOMPSON , TOMÁS, JAMES DELLATACOMA, MARK HENRY, JOEL DESROCHES

talented. So we are doing a sort of electronic Blues, Soul thing, it is quite modern. I got the idea for the real possibility of performing and performing correctly, incorporating in the digital domain. There is no doubt that we live in the modern world, so we have to be a part of it. About five years ago, I saw Frank Ocean in a club in New York, in Queens. I'm a huge fan of Frank Ocean. I think he's this generation's Marvin Gaye, he's a tremendous artist, very soulful. He has a guitarist, a bassist, and a keyboardist, then behind the stage he had a guy with a laptop and a drum machine with cameras backstage showing all these things going on at the same time. The guy wearing headphones was bringing everything together, digitally, and live-wise, it was an amazing concept."

Now, being the old curmudgeon that I am, this, at first sounded alien, but the more Tomás explained it, the more I understood that this, in some circles or pretext, could possibly be something that we need to explore further. It would be a case of, old- school meets new-school, but in real-time. It may be that the way The True Groove All-Stars have developed and grown as a recording and performing band allows different ideas and scenarios to enhance, rather than hinder the outlook of the band.

"The records I'm putting out at the moment are more intimate sounding, still Global Soul, Gospel Blues, because when I bring the full band over, I feel as though it a whole new animal. Let's give this thing a different look and see if we can reach some people like that."

One of the things that I love and respect about Tomás and the whole setup with True Groove is the willingness to diversify and test new ground whilst still retaining the core direction of the thing, Global Soul, Gospel Blues. When you see these guys performing live, you understand just how much this can grow and evolve, a real global adventure told through music. The band is in the process of releasing new music, entitled Driving Through Limbo, so I was eager after listening to Tomás wax lyrical about all these new ideas to discover exactly what we can expect.

"I'm going to be really specific here, what I want people to focus on is The Driving Through Limbo record. We want everything to coincide with the High Tide Festival, so we are going to release Vol. 2 at the same time as the festival, and the rest of our July dates. A year ago, in January, a few of the band all had birthdays, so I thought, you know what, it's time for a boy's night out, so I took the guy's to see, Meshell Ndegeocello, who is nominated for a Grammy this year, and we all know her well. After the gig, we were all so inspired by what we'd seen, at this stage of the game, it's all about the music, just the music. It was like, she gave us permission, and so much confidence. When you get to that place where there is nothing between you and what you want to do, that is real freedom."

Perhaps what Tomás is alluding to, is that when you reach that level of confidence it's almost Nirvana, a special state of mind where there is no obstacle, nothing to stop the creative juices from flowing, the band has a new energy. And, when you see these guys in full pomp, you'll soon be on the same wavelength. Part of the problem nowadays is the constant interference from outside sources, you must do this, you must do that, you have to release a single, instead of letting the band or artist do what they feel is right, what's right for the band. I like to think of it as getting back to basics, going back to where this all came from, let's get back to the roots of what influenced everyone in the very beginning.

"What we are trying to do, is take R"n" B back to what it used to be. We live in the now, and we are not trying to recreate how things used to be. With technology, you can do anything you want, but it comes from a different place. Blues, Soul, and Gospel, meeting the future, with the essence of where it all started, that's where the Global Soul can find its rightful home."

After chatting about technology, and bringing things into the brave new world, we go back to where it mattered for both Tomás - the conversation moved to Eric Clapton, B. B. King, and Robert Johnson.

"The reason that I was talking about Robert Johnson is music at its best is a living library, and what happens is, you can come across music that you like and that inspires you, and then you start looking at what inspired them. Why are they where they are, and what's the real reason for them being where they are? If I'm inspired by Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton, who inspired those guys? I was thirteen years old when I started to listen to Eric Clapton, I'd already got a band, and this opened a lot of doors for me in helping me understand the lineage of everything. I remember my mum giving me her copy of, B.B. King's Live At The Regal, and she told me, if you are going to play the guitar, you'd better start playing like that. And that makes you think, wait a minute, that's your parent's music. We'd watch TV on a Sunday night, and we'd all be watching Louis Armstrong."

I can understand what Tomás is saying. None of us would want to tell our friends that we liked and listened to our parents' music, especially as we were in our teens, that would have been so uncool. Yet years later, we embraced it - the soundtrack to our lives in many respects.

"Until you start going down the same road and realise, this is the teacher here, the root. So, if I want to get like that, or get to that standard, I'd better start right here, and that opened up a whole load of stuff for me, right back to Son House and all those guys. I remember being in a music class in school, and the teacher had a collection of vinyl on Columbia Records, and the first song that she played was, Hellhound On My Trail, by Robert Johnson. I remember the professor saying to us, 'Ok, I'm not going to beat you up about how important this is, I'm going to put something on, and you won't get it, but trust me, this is where it all starts.'"

I have waxed lyrically on more than one occasion about how we all need to find the source of what inspires us, and many times it comes back to the roots of music. Tomás Doncker and The True Groove All-Stars have fused Blues, Jazz, Funk, Soul, and Gospel and taken them all to another level. Brought them all into this generation's musical dalliances, even going so far as to allow and embrace technology to further enhance the experience. But at the end of the day, it all started here, with Robert Johnson, who then inspired everyone that followed, a list that is far too long to mention. Robert Johnson, he's the key to the door.

TRUST ME... THIS IS WHERE IT ALL STARTS!

A SPECIAL BLUES MATTERS PLAYLIST BY TOMÁS DONCKER

Sonically speaking, Tomás Doncker is all about reinvention when it comes to the blues. "I feel at home in the blues, but not as a traditionalist. I want to be more a part of the ongoing story of the legacy of the blues. The blues is its a living tradition; from father to son, mother to daughter... it's an aural history of the human condition, and because we're all constantly evolving I don't want to play it like it's already been played."

Scan the QR code with your mobile phone to listen to this playlist plus extra bonuses!

STAY IN THE MOMENT
JUDITH HILL

Colin Campbell   Ginger Sole

With a voice that effortlessly traverses genres and a stage presence that captivates audiences worldwide, Judith Hill stands as a musical force to be reckoned with. From her early days as a backup singer for some of the industry's biggest icons to her electrifying solo performances that leave audiences spellbound, Hill's journey is as remarkable as her talent.

A multi-instrumentalist, she is a self-taught pianist and guitarist and a vocal powerhouse, a soul singer... but much more than that. Blues Matters got the distinct pleasure of delving into the world of this multi-talented artist, as we uncover the depths of her musical inspiration, her unparalleled journey in the industry, and the magnetic energy that defines her as an artist.

"I was born in Los Angeles. I'm from a very musical family. Both my parents are very much the ones that got me started in music. I was surrounded by a lot of very inspiring, incredible musicians and singers as a young kid, which is what influenced me today and really shaped my music and sound for today," Judith Hill reflects on her upbringing. "I grew up singing in churches and school choirs and went on to decide that I want to do this as a professional life. There have been several chapters of my life, but it really does come from just being a kid and sitting on the sidelines and observing the greats do it and deciding one day that I wanted to do that."

Hill pursued her passion further, attending Biola Conservatory Of Music, where she studied music composition. "I loved orchestrations. I loved just being able to really write something magical and beautiful. So, I was a composer, and that's where I got my training." Judith was influenced by her mum and dad and their musical influences (They both play in Judith's current band, her mother Michiko on keyboards and father, Robert "Peewee" Hill on bass guitar); "It was a bit overwhelming at first. I felt very intimidated by all the talent and just felt like, wow, it's a very colossal energy around me. So, I felt a bit pressured from my folks in the beginning. But then I started to really appreciate it. Then I really realised that was a special upbringing, that was rare for me or for anyone in the world, just having that type of people around you constantly. That was something that later in my life I really appreciated. But at the time I think it was a bit overwhelming!"

She recalls her musical stage debut: "It was probably in church. It was one of the kids' choirs. We would perform in the church services and things like that. My stagecraft evolved for me as a kid, the stage is a sacred place. Like the church, being onstage feels like a spiritual experience and that's enormously powerful. That still sticks with me today. It feels like every time I walk on the stage, it's a chance to really channel God in a special, powerful way. But I think, as I grew into my music and into my career, the stage has taken many different forms. Fast forwarding to today, I would say that it's just this powerful meeting place, a gathering place for all the different chapters of my life. Really. It feels like a launching pad to be able to bring people together and connect. It feels powerful. I feel very honoured and humbled that I understand the stage as I do in a time like this, where it was sort of taken away from us with the pandemic and with digital music and that sort of thing. I think the younger kids these days don't understand the stages in the same way as I do, so it's exciting to be able to still understand that type of energy and the physicality of it."

"I was a self-taught singer. I just grew up singing and listening to records and copying singers that I loved, so my voice has taken a journey! But I just keep singing and keep going for it. Eventually you find your space and your sound, that's how it happened with me. I just kept singing self-taught and then, got a little vocal training later especially just for vocal health reasons. But in stylistic terms, I was just always just singing on stage and finding my own way. Aretha Franklin is like the vocal Bible for me. She has a light tone, like a jazzy one. There's so much air in her voice. Even though it sounds like she's in full belt, she's really floating on a lot of stuff, which is something that I can relate to as a vocalist, because my voice tends to have some jazz inflections to it. So, understanding soul music in that way; she's like one of the perfect examples of what I really always have been inspired by and then, of course, I love all of the Clark Sisters vocals; Dorinda, Karen, and Twinkie. Those are voices that I've always gone back to whenever I need inspiration."

"As a kid, my mom was a piano teacher for a lot of people. I was one of her students. We had kids jam bands that we would form. A lot of really great musicians came from that little universe we had but it was a fun time! I learned how to play the piano and just being in that world with my mom teaching was special. I was a bit rebellious as a kid and had a tough relationship with authority figures. Collaborating with my musician father initially caused tension, especially regarding studio recording. Over time, I realised music was my true passion, distinct from parental influence. It took time to separate my desires from their expectations."

As a former competitor on The Voice, I can't resist asking how was that experience?

"It was very enlightening in many senses because it was a way for me to understand culture in a very clear way. I didn't understand it fully at the time, but it was good for me because I understood how people in the world perceive you in public spaces and how simple the stereotypes become. It has to be very simple; one or two things about this person that define them. If you add too many elements to their identity, people get confused and don't know what to do with you. So that was really interesting to experience. As someone who's a biracial woman that's come from so many different understandings of music styles and culture, everything about me is sort of like this big cocktail of, many different elements. So, The Voice was something that was interesting to see how America dealt with all of those complexities with me particularly. It was very informative for me, but it was also very much fun. I made a lot of friends, you know, lifelong friends from that. It was a great experience. I mean a great exposure; it got me a lot of performances after that and just opened up more doors for my career."

"I think what I do is; I'm a soul singer, speaking about love and pain in a very raw way. The musical packaging of that comes with funk, soul, rock and roll, a mix of those three. Gospel is blues, soul, funk is blues, rock is blues... fundamentally, as a singer, I come from gospel music and just really roots based. A lot of what I do is blues genre based, I'm a singer that likes to have a melodic flexibility and interpretation to a template, blues music fits this!"

Turning to her writing process, she explains succinctly:

"There are really several ways I get to it; sometimes I come with the music or the lyrical concept first, sometimes with a riff, like a bassline first or a set of chord changes. My songwriting comes from so many different places. No song really is structured the same way. Also playing live I do not keep to a strict set list. Some of the songs on my new album, I have to start at the piano, because that's harmonically and foundationally where I'm going to get. But sometimes I start with the guitar because that's the type of riff that I need, or the melodies will come from the guitar. I'm mostly self-taught with that as well!"

Having a Grammy award in the 2013 film Twenty Feet From Stardom, I question what does success means for her?:

"It was a very interesting and ironic award because it was like a Grammy Award for singers who didn't get the spotlight, which is weird to me. The film connected with many people and explored ideas of stardom. Looking back, it's clearer to me, being a backing singer and now being a band leader does not feel different; both are powerful ways of using your voice. That's success for me."

"One thing that Prince said to me; about when you're on stage, and you feel like you messed up, like you made a mistake or something, didn't go well, you didn't hit the note. right? He always said, 'if you just think of it as a tennis match. You might miss the ball, but if you think about the fact that you missed that ball, then you're going to miss the next one and vice versa. So, always stay in the moment, even if you've made a mistake.' I find that to be a very powerful analogy for playing music. The music business in general and performing and constantly being consistent is just not thinking about whatever failures or unfortunate things have happened in the past. But to really stay in the present moment so that you get that note, you know? I think that's something that I'll always keep with me is just to stay in the moment!"

"I think just really reaching for that access to that higher power every day, to really feel something where God is. Waking up every day with that intention, to reach higher and access something beyond the physical and to keep being creative. Don't get caught up in what's in front of me and strive for more musically! As to the future, I really am excited about continuing to create physical spaces where music, healing, therapy, and theatre coexist. Making music with a theatrical element intrigues me, unleashing emotions not conventional to commercial spaces. It allows for deeper conversations and powerful music, accessing and doing something meaningful."

Judith's new album, Letters From A Black Widow, is out on April 26th, 2024, on Regime Music Group label.

For further information see website: www.judithhill.com

"that's success for me"

MUSIC IN HIS BONES
CHRIS SMITHER

Iain Patience | Supplied

Chris Smither is a US great. Now with almost sixty years as a musician under his belt, approaching eighty years of age, he is easily one of the USA's finest, astute, witty and incisive singer-songwriters. Blues Matters has previously spoken to the guy a few years ago as he finished a UK tour in London. This time Chris was back home across the Pond with a new album, All About the Bones, about to drop and as delightful as ever to catch up with again.

All About the Bones marks Smither's twentieth release over a career that has seen his music recorded by many greats from Emmylou Harris, Louden Wainwright, Dave Alvin and Peter Case to an old friend ,Bonnie Raitt, who has almost turned his song 'Love Me Like A Man' into her very own, personal signature offering.

Smither laughs easily when I ask about blueslady Raitt and his own interest in blues music, which goes right back to the very beginning of his eventful career. Initially, he heard some Lightnin' Hopkins and that tickled his fancy, he confirms, before he went on to discover Mississippi John Hurt and others as a youngster in 1960s New York and Massachusetts where he often visited the recently departed legendary US blues photographer and promoter Dick Waterman. Indeed, as he explains with a deep chuckle, it was here he first met Raitt where she seems to have been a near-permanent fixture:

"Bonnie was Dick's girlfriend back then. You know, you'd turn up at Dick's place in Cambridge and never know who was gonna be there. It might be Bukka White, Fred McDowell or Son House. But there was always this red-haired girl hanging around! That was Bonnie Raitt. So we sort of became good friends."

Orinally passing through New York – which he describes at the time as being 'a bit scary to me' – in the 60s,, he had worked his way north heading for Boston and Massachusets where Eric Von Schmidt was based and had told him he should aim for.

"It fitted me perfectly when I got there (he still lives in the state) and Dylan was hanging out there. But Ric Von Schmidt told me I'd fit right in there and he was right. Club 47 and Dick Waterman, all these musicians passing through or living nearby. I felt immediately comfortable. To be honest, New York scared me a little bit then." Again, he laughs as he adds, "Now I've got a bit of money I find it a bit better!"

I ask about a story I heard of him meeting a kid playing one of his songs on the street, assuming it to have been in NOLA, where he has strong connections and a love for Cajun music. He corrects me, telling me it was a true story and happened in Hawaii. "That was my song, 'No Love Today.' I stopped at an open-air fruit-stand with this gorgeous exotic fruit everywhere. This kid was sitting on a box playing guitar. I was just so happy to hear him play it so told him it was great to find him playing my song. 'Your song?' he replied with a disbelieving look and said, 'I don't think so!' I remember it so well. It was just great," Smither says with a warm laugh.

Another near-similar thought rises when I mention another of his previous thoughts where he describes the tricky nature of relationships and his late father who was then elderly, and he laughs and recounts the line, "Your parents know how to push your buttons and where they all are cos they installed them!" A thought that in many ways typifies his clever, thoughtful lyrical wit.

Although not from a traditional music family, Smither recalls finding an old Ukulele that had been his mother's in the attic when he was a kid. "She played a bit of piano but I never knew my father as playing anything. He was a lecturer at university and when I was about ten or eleven we were living in Paris where he travelled all over Europe. One time he returned from Spain and brought me a Spanish guitar, so that got me started with that. His brother had shown me my first three chords on the Uke, I must have been around eight or nine, and I remember trying to make them work on the guitar! Later, the same brother told me my father had played saxophone when young, something I didn't know at all."

Turning to his new album, he reckons songs just happen; he has no fixed way of working with them, they seem to just develop from maybe a rhythm he's exploring: "It's got some dark subject matter but maybe that's just because I'm getting old, mortality coming my way! There's one song,' In the Bardo,' I don't know how it happened but I was writing without knowing what it was but I'd read a book, a dark scary thing that scared me so much I don't think I even finished reading it. I found myself in there writing the song. I had some lyrics and truly didn't know where I was going with it. But as the song came along, I suddenly thought, that's it, I was there, in the Vardo!"

With the new release comes the inevitable promotion and touring, something I suggest might be getting tiring at his age. Instead, Smither again sniggers and says, "I'll be doing around 200 shows this year! I don't really have to tour any more but I do miss it when I don't. I guess it keeps me going, keeps me alive. And it makes me feel useful too!"

As usual, Smither will be hitting UK and Europe and confirms this is likely to be next year, in 2025. "It's already being planned but I really must tour the new album in the US first. It comes out in May. That will obviously take up at least six months or so. Only after that, later, will I be able to get back out to Europe with it."

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EMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANNY KIRANOS

Colin Campbell   Visions of the Abyss

Amigo The Devil, the enigmatic musical persona of Danny Kiranos, emerges from the depths of folk, Americana, and alternative rock with a hauntingly raw and introspective sound. With a penchant for blending macabre themes with heartfelt storytelling, Amigo The Devil crafts songs that resonate deeply with listeners, offering a glimpse into the darker corners of the human experience.

Through his distinctive blend of acoustic melodies, poignant lyrics, and evocative vocals, Amigo The Devil invites audiences on a captivating journey through the complexities of love, loss, and the human condition. With each strum of his guitar and every soul-stirring lyric, Amigo The Devil captivates audiences with his uniquely haunting and immersive musical style. Blues Matters caught up with Danny to discuss his new album, Yours Until The War Is Over and his musical roots.....

The musical moniker of Danny Kiranos; emerges not from a predetermined path but from an organic evolution of influences and inspirations. Reflecting on his journey, he notes, "it wasn't born from influences or inspirations that I necessarily had at the time." Instead, it was a process of discovering and embracing new influences as they arose. Despite humble beginnings, with limited access to a vast pool of musical resources, his artistic growth flourished.

His affinity for sound traces back to childhood, where he found fascination in the auditory spectrum beyond just music. "I've always loved sounds in general," he admits. This fascination with sound's emotive power eventually drew him into music, albeit initially spurred by a desire to fit in with his peers. Recalling his early days, he humorously recalled, "I lied about being able to play an instrument so that I could play some music with these kids I wanted to be friends with."

His musical journey began with a pragmatic approach, driven by a desire for social acceptance, rather than "a profound calling." Yet, as he immersed himself in the world of music, his passion grew. Initially self-taught on the guitar, he honed his skills out of necessity, prompted by his desire to genuinely connect with the art form.

Even amidst detours, such as pursuing brewing as a career path, music remained an undeniable force in his life. Despite momentarily veering off-course to pursue what he perceived as a "real career," the pull of music proved irresistible. "At the end of the day, it always came back to music," he reflects, acknowledging its enduring presence and significance.

Growing up immersed in metal, grunge, and thrash music, his musical journey was shaped by a lack of access to diverse genres. Reflecting on his influences, he notes, "I can't say that I had an incredibly vast range of music that I actually listened to." However, local shows and a curiosity for sound was always a constant. "We used to go watch people put delay pedals on blenders and pretend that we all understood it."

Transitioning from shock value to genuine storytelling, he emphasises a shift towards respecting darker themes with empathy, stating, "I'm genuinely trying to respect the topics more and more." Despite defying musical categorisation, he identifies storytelling as the core of his style, rooted in folk tradition. His approach shuns technical proficiency in favour of emotive resonance, affirming, "I just kind of make sounds until they sound right to me." Amigo the Devil's artistry transcends boundaries, driven by a commitment to authentic storytelling and human connection.

"Storytelling is key," insists Danny, reflecting on his music's essence. Despite his repertoire of murder ballads, he finds resonance with the blues, emphasising their emotional depth. "There's a lot of blues in my repertoire... the blues epitomise raw storytelling, conveying emotions with feral intensity. He marvels at

music's ability to evoke profound feelings silently, likening it to encountering a mysterious figure across the room. Rejecting perfection for honesty, he cherishes the imperfections in his music, valuing authenticity over production.

Releasing an album is a rollercoaster of emotions; "I was terrified... I'm just a shambles," he admits, pondering the inevitability of acceptance once the record is out. Reflecting on his earliest compositions, he shares a candid assessment of the track Perfect Wife, acknowledging its evolution from youthful experimentation to a pivotal part of his catalogue. With a penchant for storytelling, his songwriting process is intuitive, shaped by instinct and collaboration. For his latest album, he and guitarist David Talley crafted narratives together, finding clarity in shared creativity. Recording in his basement studio offered freedom from external pressures, embodying the independence he values as an artist. Through vulnerability and introspection, Amigo the Devil's music navigates the complexities of human emotion with raw authenticity. Best advice he has had was "You don't have to be the story to tell the story!

"We honestly have a very mixed fan base from all walks of life, it's rewarding because I love seeing people that wouldn't normally interact in the real world! Coming together and supporting each other and being essentially one. It's just this uniform. And I love that." Delving into the essence of their music, he highlighted its emotive core, contrasting it with mere frivolity. "A lot of it has to do with the human condition, with emotion, rather than just, oh, we want to just jump around and dance and such, which is awesome also. I also love that. Nothing wrong with that." However, beneath the surface lies a penchant for the intense and discomforting, which the artist finds deeply rewarding. "For me, as somebody who has always quite enjoyed the heaviness of emotions. Things that make me uncomfortable are rewarding." Reflecting on the connection with their audience, the musician pondered the transmission of these sentiments. "I don't know. Uh. I don't know," they confessed. "And I just. I know how it feels in that moment. I love touring, never get tired of it but I talk way too much on stage! I know that on stage, the five of us have a very interesting dynamic, It's very familial. We try to interact with each other as much as we do with the crowd."

What are his hopes and fears for the new album?:

"Hopes are, in my opinion, expectations, I guess. I really try to not have any. But for personal goals, I hope we succeeded in pushing the songwriting a little further and really try to be a little better each time and with the songwriting part, knowing how to express things in a way that feels good to me. Without thinking too much about what people expect of it, right? Fears are so easy. Fears are a million of them. I'm scared the song is going to be, you know, taken out of context!"

Danny reveals his complex outlook on life, rejecting simplistic definitions of happiness and sadness: "I'm a very happy person, despite grappling with depression. I see the beauty in life. I love being able to live it. I'm grateful for it. The older I get, the more I want to honour whatever I'm giving to the world," However, he admitted to struggling with finding motivation, content to simply embrace each day as it comes. "I'm just kind of get up and then I go, I guess I'm awake now."

For further information see website: www.amigothedevil.com

SLASH
ORGASMIC BLUES

Paul Davies · Gene Kirkland

He's the top hat, aviator shades, low slung guitar wearing lead guitarist of Hard Rock behemoths, Guns N' Roses, whose unmistakeable guitar riffs have helped to shape modern rock music. However, behind all this loud and heavy sonic attack, Slash possesses a true love of the blues with his all-star cast release, Orgy Of The Damned, coming across as his love letter to the Blues:

"I hadn't thought of it that way," he chuckles. "It was just something that I've wanted to do for a while... record some Blues covers with guys that I actually used to play with a long time ago in a blues cover band back in the late 90s," he reflects. "I always said that I wanted to record that, and I've been so busy with so many other things for all this time. Then suddenly, in between legs on the Guns N' Roses tour, I thought 'I'm going to make that record now and I called all those guys up and we put it together. It was impromptu, very casual and fun."

Slash hooked up with former fellow 'Blues Ball' band members Johnny Griparic (bass) and Teddy Andreadis (keys), plus Michael Jerome (drums) and Tash Neal (guitars/vox) and jammed up the dozen song selections in North Hollywood. They then recorded the instrumental tracks over a week in Spring 2023 at East West Studios and at his Snakepit Studio in LA with producer Mike Clink. The tight but loose feel of the backing tracks enabled the singers to do their thing as Slash takes up the story:

"A couple of them were there at the studio when we did the record. For the rest of them, I would have to go out to wherever they were, find a studio in that town and go in and record their vocals over the tracks." I enquire about his process of selecting singers: "It was pretty much the same as it was when I did the solo record with all the different singers in 2010," he affirms. "You have the song and think who would be great to do this song. I was very fortunate. I picked the right people, and they all had a close connection with each proposed track, and it went really well. It was actually very easy."

Slash further explains what Blues music means to him: "I got turned on to the blues really young. I had no aspirations to pick up the guitar back then", he declares. "I was always drawn to it even though the direction that I chose to go in as a guitar player was very much hard rock, high energy but firmly rooted in Blues guitar stylings. When I first picked up the guitar it was at the explosion of the whole finger tapping and guitar pyrotechnics era. But my influences were all from way back to those kind of guitar roots even though Guns N' Roses are a hard rock band, it's still sort of bluesy," he states. "Anyhow, when I first picked up the guitar, the blues licks were the first I learned how to play." He was raised on a diet of classic Blues based guitarists: "When I first picked up the guitar, it was primarily the British Blues guitar and rock players: Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck, Mick Taylor, Keith Richards...but in learning their stuff it turned out that their whole thing was lifted from all these older blues players I found when I was hanging out with my grandmother: BB King, Albert King, Robert Johnson, Little Walter and Lightnin' Hopkins and it took me full circle. It's been an interesting journey," he proclaims.

Slash pairs up with former Free/Bad Company singer Paul Rodgers on Albert King's Born Under A Bad Sign: "I've actually known Paul a long time and worked with him and, as soon as I knew that I was going to do this record, Paul came immediately to mind. I think he was probably one of the first people I thought of. I wanted to do Born Under A Bad Sign and automatically thought I wanted him to do it, and he did a beautiful version of it. Simple." He further: "I was always influenced by Paul Kossoff and I think that was one of the first things Paul Rodgers recognised when I first worked with him."

Surely, even a musician of Slash's stature has to pinch himself sometimes with the players involved on Orgy Of The Damned: "It's such an honour and so humbling to be able to work with all of them, but especially the ones that I have been listening to since I was a kid. They have been part of the fabric of my music existence ever since I can remember; to be able to get them to work with me on something is fucking awesome."

The album opens with Steppenwolf's, The Pusher. It's a track that Slash played in his 'Blues Ball' band and is given a slinky blues feel over which there's an out of this world vocal by The Black Crowes' Chris Robinson as Slash tells me: "He actually blew my mind when he came in and did that. He only ran through the song twice and he did two different kinds of versions of it and that's one of them. He played the harp solo live, both vocal and that solo, he was magic." There's a myriad of magical moments throughout the recording including a Blues Matters favourite Beth Hart on Stormy Monday: "She came in and that was just a rehearsal take," he reveals. "She's just singing the shit out of it in that one take, and she was done for the day. It was so intense. There was no cause to revisit it. We were playing it for the first time in the studio since we left rehearsal just feeling it out. She came in, sang it and off we went. That's a very cool, spontaneous one."

Further spellbinding instances include erstwhile Stooge Iggy Pop's menacing growl on Lightnin' Hopkins' Awful Dream: "That was the one song on the record that was chosen by the singer. I hadn't planned on doing anything with Iggy," he

declares. "But I'd heard that he had always wanted to do a Blues thing. I didn't know that and called him up and asked him if he were to choose a track to do which would he do? Awful Dream was his reply." He discloses more: "I listened to the original Lightnin' Hopkins version and it's a real rough throw together outtake. I got the basic idea, and didn't really learn it, I sort of got the idea and went into my LA studio with Iggy. We sat on a couple of stools and did it just live like that. He was fucking great and his mimicking the harp solo at the end is brilliant."

I ask Slash if it was his choice to cover Howlin' Wolf's Killing Floor with AC/DC's Brian Johnson: "That was my choice, but he's very much influenced by Howlin' Wolf and loved the idea of doing the song. It was a great outlet for him, and he relished doing it. That was a fun session," he confirms." ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons also got in on this act after some convincing by Slash: "Billy and I have been tight for a long time, and he was funny because I told him I was going to do this version of Hoochie Coochie Man. I asked him if he would play on it...In the beginning he wasn't so sure because he didn't know if I was going to bastardise the song. He didn't know what the hell it was going be.," He furthers: "I finally did a demo of it for him, and I was persistent. He heard it and liked it and did an amazing vocal. I can't imagine anybody else doing that vocal and he put a great guitar solo on it."

One of the many highlights is hearing a couple of artists recording tunes that are way out of their comfort zone such as Demi Lovato on Papa Was A Rolling Stone as Slash takes up the story: "That was the whole reason for asking her to do it. I wanted to get this young female voice to tell this story about the late and estranged infamous father and she just came to mind. I know her so I could easily approach her about it. It clicked right away when I brought the song up. She knew the song, and related to it on a personal level, and came in and just put her heart and soul into it." It is a dynamite version as is Country star Chris Stapleton performing on Peter Green's Fleetwood Mac's Oh, Well:

"I've noodled that riff around for years, for decades, but I've never really played it from one end to the other with any band that I've been with," he admits. "So, it was great to take that on and do it. Chris doing it was an eleventh-hour idea that I had. I was familiar with Chris because he and his band opened for Guns N' Roses on some shows, and he's just phenomenal. So, that was always in the back of my head to put that song together and Chris's drawl is amazing on it."

He tells me more: "We didn't know each other, and he was one of the few people that I hadn't met before. I got his number and cold called him, and he was gracious and generous about the whole thing. At one point, we had a session and then he got sick, and he couldn't do it. We made sure that he came back around and got it done."

A couple of decades sober has transformed Slash into a workaholic: "I'm not really good at sitting around," he confesses. "My problem before was that in between tours I just didn't know what to do with my time. I like to stay active." As further proof of this, and his altruistic nature, he has organised the upcoming SERPENT Blues tour in the States with Keb Mo, Beth Hart, Kingfish, Samantha Fish, Warren Haynes and more...back to the present and Orgy Of The Damned is being released on the newly established Gibson Records label which is something of a first for both artist and label as he says:

"I've been on my own label since 2010. I went to different distributors to make deals for the global release of this record, and Gibson came up and said that they were putting together a label and would I be interested in doing this record with them? Which turned out to be very perfect without any issues. It's been great partnering with them. It's not a corporate thing. That's one of the reasons I don't like using regular labels."

"Gibson is rooted in music, and we're partners on this." That puts the top hat on this beautifully tailored love letter to the Blues that first inspired this singular artist to play his way to the stars.

THE WAR ON WORDS

AN INTERVIEW WITH **TAYLOR MCCALL**

South Carolina is and has always been a hotbed of musical creativity. There must be something in air with southern and country rock morphing into latter day Americana maintaining this high state of current affairs producing a new generation of artists such as Taylor McCall.

Paul Davies Olivia Wolf

McCall has followed up his calling card debut album, Black Powder Soul, with his latest long player, Mellow War. It's a heartfelt homage to his grandfather, who graces its cover wearing dark shades and toting a gun in Vietnam. He looks like a cool dude extra from Apocalypse Now in search of Colonel Kurtz His voice is heard on opening track Sinking Sand.

Taylor relates this to me and much as we discuss his rapid ascension into being the next big Americana star whilst driving his car on the Nashville interstate, searching for a place to eat, in the company of his drummer following tour rehearsals: "Dad was a musician and he played guitar. My mother's side of the family were missionaries, and they were gospel singers. So, after Vietnam, he was not living right, just kind of not good and the night my mom was born, she wasn't supposed to make it. He prayed and he said, 'If you save my girl, I'll dedicate my life to you God'. She lived and he became a missionary and started some churches around Nova Scotia, Canada". He continues: "They played as a family for the churches. It was the whole family. My grandmother played piano, my grandfather sang, my mom, uncles, they all sang harmony. The harmonies you hear on Black Powder Soul's and Mellow War's intros, my mom's fourteen years old singing in those church recordings which is kind of a wild thought."

Taylor recalls spending his formative years with his family spreading 'the good word': "I spent a lot of time with them, and I travelled." He adds: "I didn't really understand what it was, but I enjoyed the travelling which was awesome and would stay with different people. My grandfather was just the type of guy who made such an impact on people's lives that they loved him more than your average person loved just a stranger. That's how I ultimately have all these recordings because someone in the church loved my grandfather enough to record and save them and now I get to have them which is awesome."

War is by its very nature a feisty affair and is a topic around which Taylor contemplates on this recording as he reveals the meaning behind this album's title, Mellow War: "A record title takes a while to find until the right song comes along. After I did my first record, I kind of said everything I felt I could possibly say and played everything that I wanted to play and more..." states Taylor. "They say you have your whole life to write your first record and a year to write your second. I was bumming around and didn't have any ideas. Then I started chewing on the words 'mellow war', like a contrast of something. I read that in Vietnam, the most terrifying times were not when the action was happening, but when there was nothing going on and the anticipation for bullets flying and stuff. So, it's this kind of a metaphor of life. But first and foremost, it's a very juicy title. It sounds good." Although first impressions reveal the power of sparseness in Taylor's music, he put a considerable amount of thought into his less is more approach as he details: "This record is mainly an acoustic guitar and piano driven record because I wrote a lot of the songs on piano. However, one of the things I'm proud of is using the electric guitar tastefully. There's a lot of people that are all pyro no gyro. I love the blues so much, but a lot of the modern blues can be a bit too much for me. To use an electric guitar riff or solo tastefully is a great challenge to me."

"HE'S STILL MESSING WITH ME A BIT"

Taylor has been out touring opening for Robert Plant and Saving Grace, with Suzie Dian, and reveals the advice and encouragement the former Led Zeppelin frontman has offered him: "It kinda blows my mind. He's like, 'Oh, I listened to your songs before the show tonight'. That's crazy and he's always watching. He gives me feedback like, 'Hey, I feel like you could lean into it maybe more here...' trying to push me even when I'm doing good. He's still messing with me a little bit. I can tell. He cares enough to even be there. I have to catch myself." As well as this living 'rock god' providing inspiration, Taylor is a Jimi Hendrix obsessive:

"I never thought I'd get the opportunity to even make it to the UK where Jimi spent most of his formative years and go to all of them landmarks. When I got to tour with Robert Plant, on the days off I went to Jimi's flat (Brook Street, London) and I spent a lot of time in Jimi's room. I went to the house where he wrote 'The Wind Cries Mary' that I think Ringo owned."

He furthers: " There's this cosmic thing with Jimi as he pops up in many ways in my life. I never thought I would ever stand where he might have stood. When I started doing music, it was a matter of time before I got to go to Electric Ladyland. I'm also gonna get to play one of his guitars, which I never thought I would get to do. A guy that I met recently reached out to me and he owns Jimi's guitar that he used while he was in Nashville. So, that's gonna be a heavy day."

Like many musicians and songwriters who seek a career in the Americana/Country music business, Taylor initially relocated to Nashville before recently moving to a nearby suburb: "I'm now based south of town away from the glitz and the glam out in the country in Franklin, Tennessee. I'm fortunate enough to have met a lovely artist and she had moved from San Francisco. She was just getting into making music and purchased a property with a studio that was sitting empty. I was like, 'Well, I'm just going to move into your guest house, and we'll get this console working and get everything right. It was an empty canvas with just a console in there and that's the console on which Stevie Ray Vaughan cut his record, In Step. That console is what I have been learning on which is pretty powerful."

With two solo albums in the tank, Taylor can always count upon mother nature to inspire him: "I had to move outside of Nashville. It's just a concrete jungle and it's hard to be inspired. After a while there you feel like an accountant. I have to be out in the woods where things are slower paced, you can take a drive down the road and not get stuck in traffic, you know!" The (Mc)call of the wild is in his blood and there in his music. Nevertheless, there is plenty of crosstown traffic on the way as he gears up for his next project of electric guitar led Americana blues music, Now, that also sounds tailor made for Blues Matters readers.

“I love an unpredictable setlist”

LUTHER IN MIND

AN INTERVIEW WITH BERNARD ALLISON

Dino Bedrocker   Laura Carbone

Bernard Allison is a renowned blues musician whose musical journey is deeply rooted in his family's legacy. Born into a rich musical heritage as the son of legendary blues guitarist Luther Allison, Bernard has carved out his own distinctive sound that blends traditional blues with elements of rock, soul, and gospel. With a career spanning over three decades, he has garnered acclaim for his electrifying live performances and soulful song-writing.

His latest album, Luther's Blues, a heartfelt tribute to his father, showcases his versatility as an artist and reaffirms his status as a torchbearer of the blues tradition. Through his music, Bernard Allison continues to captivate audiences worldwide and uphold the timeless legacy of the blues.

The new release pretty much took the music world by storm. I ask if thils was surprising for him? <or was this a little gem he had hidden for a while?

"Yeah, it was pretty interesting how it came up because obviously we just finished the 30-year anniversary tour for Ruf Records and he was asking, say, we need something out there for, you know, for this tour. And I said, Well, rather than rush back in the studio just to try to make something for the tour, I said, let me let me go back through all my albums and pull out all my dad's songs, not all of them, but enough to do an album with. He loved the idea. I said, Yeah, it only makes sense since my father basically started the record with Tomas Ruf!"

"And so instead and it was kind of a chance at risk actually, to do because the technology changed your music since trying to combine all of my earlier recordings with the newer things. So when Tomas sent it back to me to approve, he had it remastered remixed to be ready in Germany, and it blew me away. I could not believe the sound."

"I'm like, Wow, this it sounds everything sounds together, you know? Nice dynamic of the song, the song choice and really show the people my take on my father for the 30th anniversary. So it all came together and made sense, and we sold a lot records."

"So I'm very pleased with the success and I'm proud that everybody really appreciate what I did to to put them all together and say, this is Bernard Allison playing his father's music."

"It's pretty much like I say, I pulled a couple songs off of all my records that I recorded previously reporting, and I've always said it's been since day one. I would always include one or two of my dad's songs on every record, and to this day it was doing that. So, I have no regrets. I typically go for songs that's been overlooked because of other stronger songs on the record. So, you know, I'm happy with the outcome is that I'm not continuing to do it and that's a great thing and a great positive note to go on."

Asked about his on-the-road approach to it, he explains: "I typically give them a mix of everything, including, you know, my own original songs that I'm very solid on, do other songs. So it's either my songs or my dad's. Once in a while I might hear the Hendrix before Blue Child or something like that, but typically we're playing all our original music."

Reflecting on his position, he says: "You know what I grew up with? I grew up with gospel and Dad's. Thank you to my dad. I'm playing what I grew up with, opposed to what people expect me to be that dominant blues player as a great way of putting out yet. But there is certain found-out-later feel. My dad closed my eyes and I just remember when I was his bandleader and we do these songs together and I'm like, okay, he's standing right here looking at me, you know? But he's with me everywhere I go. Yeah, it comes often. And even my mom, when she sees, she's like, If you close your eyes, the hole in your time is more and more like your father's oil. They look like for you to fade. So it's okay. You stay healthy. So our big support with my family as well is great."

I raise a few points with him: It's great how you just keep the music alive for your father and for yourself and your family. When you are out on the road, then is it the same kind of is it the same band you're playing with, you know, or you're picking different people up and it's coming down with, or are you just keeping it close?

"Never sure what's to sell. Yeah, I keep my whole band who were just two for two years from now. George More bass guitar man, Mathew on the drums and Eric Roberts on keyboards. And then I handle the guitar parts. We all sing, so we have some harmonies that we can include, and it's just a fun time. You know, we're like I say, we're more a live band than even recording. We record live. I don't like to spend too much time in the studio trying to make it perfect. Nobody's perfect, and I want to be able to reproduce it live as well."

I suggest so many people overdo the work and it doesn't need to change.; do you actually play exactly as recorded on the road?:

"No, no, we really can play it. Exactly. Because I basically feed off of the crowd. Love it. The energy of the crowd will get that already changed the groove for me as well as my musicians. So yeah, we stick to the format, but everything's basic and living that I probably won't even remember exactly what I played, you know what I mean? So we just keep it over, you know, and just play with our hearts and play with our public. And that is what's maintaining my success of touring is that people know that I'm that I do the wrong approach to play some funky new place and rocky start playing the down home thing. So, we're very unpredictable as far as where we're going to go, which I like to do. It's kind of like playing a game with the other key back and forth. Yeah, you just never know. You know, I love an unpredictable setlist".

I raise the question, what would you say your music represents?: " What is it if I always call the truth, the beginning, the music of the next generation, which can go a long way because now we have a whole new generation of players coming out young, amazing talent that's coming out. So what I've done, hopefully, they can take some ideas and and do what I've done, just like I did. I took away from my dad, Koko Taylor, Howard Taylor, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Johnny Winans. So maybe there is something the youngsters, rather than focus on one person or one player, you try and say, wow, I like how Bernard Allison played that because it doesn't come across as the old school blues because of the different jam parents we're mixing into the music. So, I basically play it so that the youngsters can take it, the older ones can take it, and run with it, turn it into their own."

STILL GOT THE FIRE

AN INTERVIEW WITH MITCH RYDER

Adam Kennedy Georg Pieron

Mitch Ryder hails from a locale that is synonymous with music, that being Detroit, or Motor City, as it is affectionally known. The area is best known for genres such as Motown, punk rock and even techno.

But what is it about Detroit that has been a catalyst for such musical greatness? "I think you'll find that in most urban cities, opportunity for the lower classes is very limited. And so, you really have to explore avenues to fame when you're brought up and you don't have a higher education," explains Mitch. "You can become an athlete, you can become a musician, or you can do something in the arts, where talent is the primary factor you need to survive. And everybody has some degree of talent, even the uneducated. You don't have to go to Harvard to become a rock and roll star. I know very few stars from Harvard. But I think that's what happening in Detroit and other working-class cities is there's frustration, nobody wants to work hard labour if they don't have to. And so, your concentration falls into those other categories I mentioned."

Mitch Ryder was the last person to perform with the late great Otis Redding in Cleveland, Ohio, in December 1967. Redding and members of his touring band tragically died in a plane crash in Wisconsin the following day. Ryder recalls the legendary soul singer.

"I did a recording at Stax, and I did it with Booker T and the MGs and the Memphis Horns. And that's where I ran into him. But we had performed at some of the same venues, a couple of times," recollects Mitch. "I was, by happenstance, on the same broadcast in Cleveland, Ohio, that he was on. And the producer wanted to wrap up the show. And somebody said, well, why don't the two of you do a song together? And Otis and I talked about it and we chose Knock on Wood. And the thing I'll remember over everything else was that he was a bigger man than myself, and he put his arm on my shoulder, and we started rocking together at one point. I remember the unearthly feeling every time he turned to the left, my right foot would literally leave the ground. But he's one of my favourites as well. In terms of his voice, there are voices in history that you'll always remember like Sam Cooke or Aretha Franklin, for example, and these are voices that stand on their own. They are easily recognisable, and Otis was one of those, the only voice that could ever sound that way."

Fast forward to the present day, and Mitch Ryder recently released his new live album titled The Roof Is On Fire. The double CD was part of the artist's 75th birthday celebration and was recorded in Germany.

"I favour live recordings for the simple fact that I've discovered over the years that you can do some incredible stuff in the studio, but no matter what happens when you start performing that stuff live, there's a different energy that arrives and comes to the music. In an isolated studio, everything has to be perfect and everything's reviewable, and you can make changes. In live, you get the creative energy from the artist's performing. And so not only do you have the energy between the audience and the artists, but you also have the creative energy," explains Mitch.

"I REMEMBER THAT UNEARTHLY FEELING"

The artist has a long relationship with Germany. Their first rehearsal in the aforementioned location was at a communist-run youth centre in East Berlin. "There's a history that I have, due to my age, that recalls the Cold War and before that, and so it was like entering into a forbidden place. And once you get there, you realise how close they were actually to having their freedom. And all it took was just somebody to say, hey, this isn't real, that is, and you need to make the jump," explains Mitch. "And they jumped at the chance because they were very exposed to Western Germany, which was at that time and place a democracy. Then the wall came down, and we started to forage into territories we've never been into. At the same time, it allowed the East German band to visit territories they were never exposed to in the West. Territories that I had been cultivating for 17 years prior to meeting up with them. And it was magical in a way because they revelled in their newfound freedom. And I was very interested in what could be accomplished in a new territory."

One of many outstanding tracks on the artist's new double live album is a cover of the Bob Dylan classic Subterranean Homesick Blues. But what was it about that track which made Mitch choose it for the album? "That goes way back because I'm a huge Bob Dylan fan. I was with him when he was not even electric; I was following his folk career," explains Mitch. "I was actually chosen at this particular time in my career in New York City when I was still a major star; I was invited to attend his sessions of Highway 61 Revisited. I had a front-row seat to watch him create and work with the band. That was pretty amazing. And I bought a copy recently, somebody tipped me off to his book about modern music. In the first chapter, he mentioned my name, and I was elated. I said wow, Bob Dylan even knows who I am. That's great. It was a love of his music that made me want to do it."

Moving forward, the artist has the next year already mapped out. "That includes a studio album, an American tour, a small American tour to promote the album you're listening to. And then February, March of next year, a tour to promote the studio CD, and we'll start releasing that in Europe, and do it the other way around and then release it last in America. And try to gain some momentum out of Europe to help push us into the American market," concludes Ryder.

The Roof Is On Fire, the new live album from Mitch Ryder is out now via Ruf Records.

LIVE MUSIC

ERJA LYYTINEN

05 APR	THE CLUNY	NEWCASTLE
06 APR	VOODOO ROOMS	EDINBURGH
07 APR	CRESCENT COMMUNITY CENTRE	YORK
09 APR	THE 1865	SOUTHAMPTON
10 APR	THE HALF MOON	LONDON
11 APR	WATERLOO MUSIC BAR	BLACKPOOL
12 APR	EASTWELL VILLAGE HALL	MELTON MOWBRAY
13 APR	HRH BLUES FESTIVAL	SHEFFIELD
14 APR	THE LAMP TAVERN	DUDLEY

WHEN RIVERS MEET

27 APR	THE BROOK	SOUTHAMPTON
28 APR	THEKLA,	BRISTOL
02 MAY	GORILLA,	MANCHESTER
03 MAY	ST LUKES	GLASGOW
04 MAY	BRUDENELL SOCIAL	LEEDS
09 MAY	EPIC STUDIOS	NORWICH
10 MAY	RESCUE ROOMS	NOTTINGHAM
11 MAY	THE GARAGE	LONDON

KIRA MAC

25 APR	BRUDENELL SOCIAL CLUB	LEEDS
26 APR	ACADEMY	MANCHESTER
27 APR	ORAN MOR	GLASGOW
28 APR	ANARCHY BREW CO	NEWCASTLE
02 MAY	RESCUE ROOMS	NOTTINGHAM
03 MAY	THE 1865	SOUTHAMPTON
04 MAY	KK'S STEEL MILL	WOLVERHAMPTON
05 MAY	WATERFRONT STUDIO	NORWICH
08 MAY	LOST HORIZON	BRISTOL
09 MAY	ARLINGTON ARTS	NEWBURY
10 MAY	UNDERWORLD	LONDON
11 MAY	UNDERGROUND	STOKE

JOE BONAMASSA

04 APR	ROYAL ALBERT HALL	LONDON, UK
05 APR	ROYAL ALBERT HALL	LONDON, UK

JOOLS HOLLAND

01 DEC	SEC ARMADILLO	GLASGOW
02 DEC	SEC ARMADILLO	GLASGOW
06 DEC	FORUM	BATH
07 DEC	BEACON	BRISTOL
08 DEC	PAVILLIONS	PLYMOUTH
09 DEC	BRIGHTON CENTRE	BRIGHTON
15 DEC	SYMPHONY HALL	BIRMINGHAM
16 DEC	SYMPHONY HALL	BIRMINGHAM
17 DEC	FIRST DIRECT ARENA	LEEDS
20 DEC	BARBICAN	YORK
21 DEC	UTILITA ARENA	CARDIFF
22 DEC	02 APOLLO	MANCHESTER

ROBIN TROWER

28 MAY	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL	LONDON
30 MAY	GLASSHOUSE INT. CENTRE	GATESHEAD
31 MAY	HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME	HOLMFIRTH

BRAVE RIVAL

05 APR	BRIGHTON, CONCORDE	BRIGHTON
06 APR	THE STABLES	WAVENDON
26 APR	LIBRARY THEATRE	LEIGHTON BUZZARD
27 APR	LEAMINGTON SPA	TEMPERANCE
11 MAY	BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK FESTIVAL	STOCKTON-ON-TEES
12 MAY	LINCOLN BLUES RHYTHM & ROCK	LINCOLN
16 MAY	DAVID EVANS COURT THEATRE	TRING
24 MAY	SOUTHAMPTON, 1865	SOUTHAMPTON
25 MAY	LONDON, DINGWALLS	LONDON

KRIS BARRAS

06 APR	THE FOUNDRY	TORQUAY
12 APR	ENGINE ROOMS	SOUTHAMPTON
13 APR	KK'S STEEL MILL	WOLVERHAMPTON
14 APR	MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2	MANCHESTER
17 APR	THE GARAGE	GLASGOW
18 APR	BOILER SHOP	NEWCASTLE
19 APR	ROCK CITY	NOTTINGHAM
20 APR	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL	LONDON
15 AUG	CHEPSTOW CASTLE	CHEPSTOW

BEX MARSHALL

08 SEP	DARLINGTON BLUES FESTIVAL	DARLINGTON
13 SEP	BLUES ON THE BAY	STOCKTON ON TEES

EMMA WILSON

17 AUG	GT. NORTH EAST R&B WEEKEND	NEW MARSKE
14 SEPT	CLAYPATH DELICATESSEN	DURHAM
05 OCT	DISEWORTH BLUES CLUB	DERBY
13 OCT	TYNE BAR	NEWCASTLE
22 NOV	LEEDS BLUES CLUB	LEEDS

ARIELLE

03 SEP	TUESDAY NIGHT MUSIC CLUB	SURREY
04 SEP	1865	SOUTHAMPTON
06 SEP	GREYSTONES	SHEFFIELD
07 SEP	ANARCHY BREW CO	NEWCASTLE
08 SEP	ASYLUM	BIRMINGHAM
10 SEP	MUSICIAN,	LEICESTER
11 SEP	LIVE ROOMS	CHESTER

BIG WOLF BAND

02 MAR	BOROUGH BLUES CLUB	WALES
22 MAR	LEEDS BLUES CLUB	LEEDS
29 MAR	THE BEAR	LUTON
31 MAR	NANTWICH JAZZ AND BLUES	NANTWICH
5 APR	TEMPERANCE	LEAMINGTON
12 APR	ARLINGTON ARTS CENTRE	NEWBURY
14 APR	BROMLEY BLUES CLUB	BROMLEY
20 APR	BLUES AT THE BARLEYLANDS	BILLERICAY
21 APR	HOPE TAVERN	MARKET RASEN
24 MAY	SALTBURN BLUES CLUB	REDCAR
25 MAY	BOOZE AND BLUES FESTIVAL	LEICESTER
07 JUN	LAMP TAVERN	DUDLEY
13 JUN	RED ARROW MUSIC CLUB	RAMSGATE
16 JUN	BLUES WKND@THE TOORAK	TORQUAY
09 AUG	DARLINGTON R&B CLUB	DARLINGTON

17 AUG	OLD BUSH BLUES FESTIVAL	OLD BUSH
24 AUG	RORY GALLAGHER FESTIVAL	NANTWICH
06 SEP	NENE VALLEY FESTIVAL	NENE VALLEY
15 SEP	RED LION	STEVENAGE
20 SEP	JOE JOE JIM'S	BIRMINGHAM
04 OCT	BACKSTAGE AT THE GREEN	KINROSS
12 OCT	LEGENDS BLUES CLUB	TAMWORTH
01 NOV	DELTA BLUES & AMERICANA CLUB	COLNE
23 NOV	GIFFARD ARMS	WOLVERHAMPTON
13 DEC	EMSWORTH MUSIC CLUB	EMSWORTH

ROBERT JON & THE WRECK

20 NOV	THE APPLEYARD	SITTINGBOURNE
21 NOV	KOMEDIA	BRIGHTON
22 NOV	KOMEDIA	BATH
23 NOV	THE 1865	SOUTHAMPTON
25 NOV	THE BOILER SHOP	NEWCASTLE
26 NOV	ST LUKE'S	GLASGOW
27 NOV	JUNCTION	CAMBRIDGE
28 NOV	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL	LONDON
30 NOV	02 ACADEMY	OXFORD
01 DEC	ROCK CITY	NOTTINGHAM

WALTER TROUT

16 OCT	OPERA HOUSE	BUXTON
17 OCT	QUEENS HALL	EDINBURGH
18 OCT	THE GLASSHOUSE	GATESHEAD
19 OCT	PICTUREDROME	HOLMFIRTH
22 OCT	APEX	BURY ST EDMUNDS
23 OCT	CHEESE & GRAIN	FROME
24 OCT	TOWN HALL	BIRMINGHAM
25 OCT	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL	LONDON

FESTIVALS IN 2024

UPTON BLUES FESTIVAL
JUL 19–21

Upton Upon Severn, Worcestershire
upton-blues-festival.co.uk

EALING BLUES FESTIVAL
JUL 27–28

Ealing, London W5
ealingbluesfestival.com

THE GREAT BRITISH RHYTHM & BLUES FESTIVAL
AUG 23–25

The Pendle Hippodrome, Lancashire
www.bluesfestival.co.uk

ALL INFORMATION CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT. PLEASE CHECK WITH THE VENUES BEFORE TRAVELLING OR BOOKING HOTELS

RMR TOP 50

ROOTS MUSIC REPORT'S BLUES ALBUM CHART

POS	ARTIST	ALBUM	LABEL
1	CHRIS O'LEARY	THE HARD LINE	ALLIGATOR
2	ROBERT FINLEY	BLACK BAYOU	EASY EYE SOUND
3	DANIELLE NICOLE	THE LOVE YOU BLEED	FOURTY BELOW
4	TINSLEY ELLIS	NAKED TRUTH	ALLIGATOR
5	TOM HAMBRIDGE	BLU JA VU	QUARTO VALLEY
6	COCO MONTOYA	WRITING ON THE WALL	ALLIGATOR
7	BOBBY RUSH	ALL MY LOVE FOR YOU	DEEP RUSH
8	PETER VETESKA & BLUES TRAIN	FULL TILT	BLUE HEART
9	BLACK PUMAS	CHRONICLES OF A DIAMOND	ATO
10	GHALIA VOLT	SHOUT SISTER SHOUT	RUF
11	KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD BAND	DIRT ON MY DIAMONDS, VOL. 1	MASCOT
12	JOE BONAMASSA	BLUES DELUXE VOL. 2	J&R ADVENTURES
13	SETH JAMES	LESSONS	QUALIFIED
14	BROTHERS BROWN	NOWHERE LEFT TO GO	WOODWARD AVENUE
15	CEDAR COUNTY COBRAS	HOMESICK BLUES	SELF-RELEASE
16	JOEL ASTLEY	SEATTLE TO GREASELAND	BLUE HEART
17	BOB CORRITORE	BOB CORRITORE & FRIENDS: PHOENIX BLUES RUMBLE	VIZZTONE
18	D.K. HARRELL	THE RIGHT MAN	LITTLE VILLAGE
19	SUE FOLEY	LIVE IN AUSTIN VOL. 1	SELF-RELEASE
20	NICK MOSS	GET YOUR BACK INTO IT!(FEAT. DENNIS GRUENLING)	ALLIGATOR
21	THE DIG 3	DAMN THE RENT	SELF-RELEASE
22	MITCH WOODS	FRIENDS ALONG THE WAY(DELUXE EDITION)	CLUB 88
23	BERNARD ALLISON	LUTHER'S BLUES	RUF
24	BRAD "GUITAR" WILSON	BUCKLE UP!	CALI BEE
25	KEVIN BURT	THANK YOU BROTHER BILL: A TRIBUTE TO BILL WITHERS	GULF COAST
26	FRANCK L. GOLDWASSER	WHO NEEDS THIS MESS!!??	CROSSCUT
27	JASON RICCI & THE BAD KIND	BEHIND THE VEIL	GULF COAST
28	JOHNNY RAWLS	WALKING HEART ATTACK	CATFOOD
29	PATTI PARKS	COME SING WITH ME	VIZZTONE
30	JENNIFER PORTER	YES, I DO	COUGAR MOON
31	TERESA JAMES & THE RHYTHM TRAMPS	ROSE-COLORED GLASSES VOL. 2	BLUE HEART
32	ARLEN ROTH AND JERRY JEMMOTT	SUPER SOUL SESSION!	BLUE HEART
33	CHRISTONE "KINGFISH" INGRAM	LIVE IN LONDON	ALLIGATOR
34	ALTERED FIVE BLUES BAND	TESTIFYIN'	BLIND PIG
35	JOYANN PARKER	ROOTS	HOPELESS ROMANTIC
36	MIKE ZITO	LIFE IS HARD	GULF COAST
37	CHRIS BEARD	PASS IT ON DOWN	BLUE HEART
38	GUITAR JACK WARGO	THE NEW NORMAL	SELF-RELEASE
39	EDDIE 9V	CAPRICORN	RUF
40	RICK VITO	CADILLAC MAN	BLUE HEART
41	EMMA WILSON	MEMPHIS CALLING	SELF-RELEASE
42	DIEGO MONGUE BAND	WHILE YOU WERE GONE	SELF-RELEASE
43	LARRY TAYLOR AND THE TAYLOR FAMILY	GENERATIONS OF BLUES: WEST SIDE LEGACY	NOLA BLUE
44	11 GUYS QUARTET	11 X 11	VIZZTONE
45	MISTY BLUES	OUTSIDE THE LINES	GUITAR ONE
46	CHRIS YAKOPCIC	LIVE AT THE HIDDEN GEM	YAKO
47	BOB MARGOLIN	THANKS	VIZZTONE
48	ALBERT CUMMINGS	STRONG	IVY MUSIC COMPANY
49	SUNNYSIDERS	27 STITCHES	DANCING BEAR
50	LIL' JIMMY REED WITH BEN LEVIN	BACK TO BATON ROUGE	NOLA BLUE

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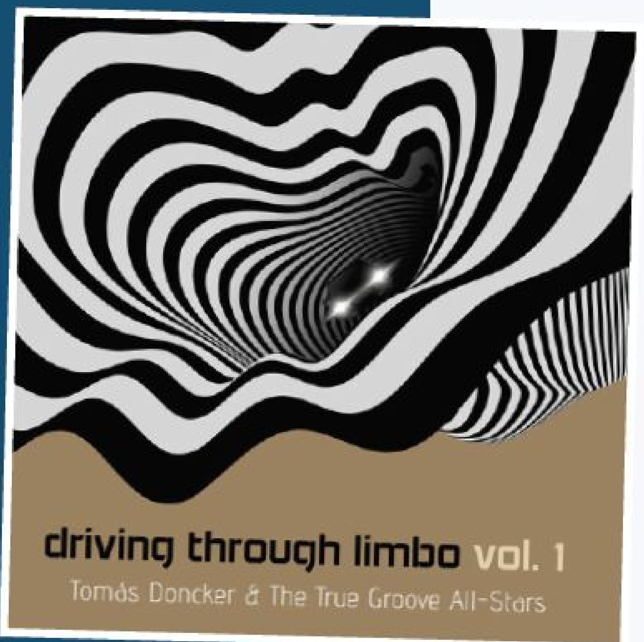
BIG BLUES REVIEWS

TOMÁS DONCKER & THE TRUE GROOVE ALL-STARS

DRIVING THROUGH LIMBO VOL1

True Groove



I have been very lucky over the years, being able to listen to many albums, and going to see so many gigs. I have seen the best of the best, in large venues, and, more importantly, in small venues. One of the finest, most talented, nice, and all-around superb bunch of people I've had the pleasure of listening to

> *They are the real deal*

and watching, is The True Groove All-Stars. Tomás Doncker and the band, have, over the years put out some of the finest Blues, Soul, and Funk music I've heard in many a year. From releasing a tribute album to Howlin' Wolf to releasing album after album of some of the finest funky music. The guys are based in Brooklyn, New York, and the early 70s vibe of New York is very prevalent on this album. The opening track, All Together Now, brings the Soul, and Funk right from the get-go. This is such a sweet smooth track, the harmonies are superb, and the Special Horns add their groove to the mix, you could almost be in Studio 54. Now, you may say, what do songs like this have to do with the Blues? Well, the band aims to promote their Global Soul around the world, which incorporates, Blues, Jazz, Soul, and Funk. It's a hybrid of musical genres all coming from a very similar place, and all shooting out into every musical nook and cranny. I'm Gone, and Let Me Be Dirty, are very different tunes, but they do have a very endearing quality to them, I'm Gone, is packed full of Funk, the horns tearing it up so majestically. Let Me Be Dirty allows Tomás to showcase his huge talents as a Blues guitarist, not in your face, but subtly, and with feeling, for me, this is the standout track on the album, which takes nothing away from any of the others. If you haven't heard anything from this band, or seen them performing live, I urge to to do something about it. They are the real deal, you will be as blown away as I am.

STEPHEN HARRISON

ROB TOGNONI

REBEL

M.I.G. Records

From the first chord to the last wail of his guitar, Tognoni's prowess as a musician is unmistakable, and his newest release showcases his talent to the full. The album kicks off with the rocker, Rebel And A Gambler a gritty anthem that sets the tone. Tognoni's vocals exude defiance, while his guitar work is nothing short of electrifying, weaving through the song with precision and passion. Eyes Wide Open has a swagger and poise of its own and Rob's guitar artistry never better, with a chugging riff and visceral lyrics. Primeval Baby, and A Mystery Man are high-octane rides fuelled by Tognoni's relentless energy and virtuosity on the guitar. His riffs are razor-sharp, his solos blistering with intensity, leaving listeners exhilarated and craving more. The reinterpretation of Whisky In The Jar is just a joy to hear. So too, his take on David Bowie's Rebel Rebel is gutsy and shows defiance. Yet, this is not all about fast-paced rockers. Tognoni shows his versatility with tracks where he delves into more soulful territory, like the ethereal Orion, displaying his emotive vocal delivery and soul-stirring guitar melodies. Overall, this seventeen-track release is a tour de force of blues-infused rock that showcases Rob Tognoni's exceptional talent as both a vocalist and a guitarist. With its dynamic range, electrifying performances, and infectious energy, this is a must-listen for fans of blues and rock alike. Included are also two live tracks, the rocking, Lands Of Cirrus and blues infused Lil' Melody.

COLIN CAMPBELL

3 MILE SHOUT

LOW BATTERY

Who Said That

I guess this is a tale of three Richard's. Messer's Manwaring, Hewlett and Woodfin all come from differing professional backgrounds respectively sound engineering, aircraft engineering and education. Over decades music has always been a place where it has never mattered what came before or where you come from. It is a place where the sum is always greater than the individual parts. So melded together here is a fine example of just that. Ten tracks with differing atmospheres, which actually create a good listen. Throughout the basic trio of guitar, bass and drums are augmented by additional vocalists, percussion, keys, horns, strings etc. I kinda like the fact that you are never exactly sure what kind of groove will pop up next. So you get elements of Blues, Jazz, Funk, Rock etc. It could be argued that the band doesn't really know what they want but I say most strongly that it keeps it fresh. As long as the overall sound, crisp, clear and beautifully placed is similar and that has been achieved by the tracking engineer Dave Williams at The Grange. So the album opens strongly with Feeling Good and Hold You Tight. Are that little touches of Steely Dan and AWB I hear? The atmospheric City Night is slow and sultry. Funky grooves abound on Don't Tell Me and Drivin'. The pace dips with When The Tide Comes In almost into Folk territory with the haunting violin, a really nice touch. So we begin to build towards the end with the instrumental title track quickly followed by the almost spoken Blues of The Ballad Of Wild Billy Drew and a Fast Train to get out of town at the end. A promising debut.

GRAEME SCOTT

61 GHOSTS

BARSTOOL DREAMS

Independent

If you like your blues and Americana stamped through with southern atmosphere like a piece of seaside rock, then this could be the album for you. For a duo, just Joe Mazzari and percussionist Dixie Deadwood (great name!), they make a lot of interesting noise on this album. The writing has a definite flavour of Bob Dylan (who is a fan) about it. Mr Mazzari's voice has a wonderfully careworn gravelly sound to it, the sound of a man who has lived a few lifetimes. And he has, having survived time working with Johnny Thunders among others, and living to tell the tale.

Rob Blackham

SUSAN SANTOS

SONORA

Independent

Susan Santos's sixth studio release marks a significant chapter in her musical journey. The title itself evokes a sense of the expansive desert landscape that serves as the backdrop for the eight stunning tracks within. Each tune, from the opening rock blues infused Hot Rod Lady, while diverse in style, flows with a common theme, the desert's raw allure. Re-

> *stands out as a testament to her creative vision*

corded at Madrid's Black Betty Studios and produced collaboratively by Susan Santos and Jose Nortes, this displays a rich tapestry of guitar work, ranging from the rustic twang of Country vibes on Have Mercy, to the ethereal strains of psychedelia on last track Let It Ride. The band comprising, David Salvador on bass and Juli El Lento on drums, craft a sonic narrative that speaks of survival, thirst, outlaws, and liberation amidst the arid expanse. Santos's prowess as a musician shine throughout, as she deftly navigates lead vocals and an array of instruments including electric, baritone, and acoustic guitars, banjo, and even the theremin. Her songs, infused with vivid imagery of scorpions, lizards, and roadrunners, as in the swampy tune, Snakebite transports listeners to the heart of the desert, urging caution and a sense of adventure before embarking on the journey. Voodoo Wheels even incorporates rockabilly adding to the eclectic music style feel. Hailing from Madrid, Santos emerges as a formidable figure in the music scene, highlighting her mastery as a self-taught left-hand guitarist and a prolific songwriter. This release stands out as a testament to her creative vision and enduring influence in the world of guitar-driven music.

COLIN CAMPBELL

Fran Mayo

There is a wry sense of humour here, with a Warren Zevon-esque Undercover Elvis pondering the notion that the legend still alive and living a low-profile life. Joe Mazzari is clearly a consummate musician, witness the cleverly layered guitars and bass on Crooked Smile, another witty tale of a ripped off musician, and strangers to be avoided. The Dylan influence is front and centre in Scars, an acoustic-and-light-percussion walk through Joe Mazzari's ability to craft intelligent and deep-thinking stories about the human condition. In fact, the further into the album you go, the more your admiration for superior songcraft will increase as Angry Feet explores the sharper edges of romance and relationships. If there is a distillation of the landscape-creation of Bob Dylan's writing, and Bruce Springsteen's utterly honest and deeply affecting vocal delivery, it's on Lying In My Arms, and it makes you want to hope and dream that this duo can get a band together and make their way over here, so we can experience this art in concert form. With Enemy, a chance for the duo to stretch out and let rip, and Nine Pints Late even has bagpipes on it! Probably the signature sound of the band is on Tin Can which has gritty vocals, funky bass, and heavyweight drums, and a dark tale of the rigours of touring. This is intelligent blues rock wonderfully crafted. Get into this band before deserved fame puts them out of reach.

ANDY HUGHES

BJ BAARTMANS

GHOST-WRITER

Continental Record Services

Bart-Jan (BJ) Baartmans, a seasoned singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist producer with a musical journey spanning back to 1980, new release is a musical odyssey. With a musical repertoire that includes various bands like BJ's Pawnshop and Hidden Agenda Deluxe, he has etched his presence in the industry, participating in numerous album sessions and gracing the stage around 4,000 times. Ghostwriter, released over twenty-five years after his debut album, features thirteen self-penned tracks that delve into personal narratives, observations, and perspectives. The album weaves together elements of Americana, pub rock, and folk, drawing inspiration from the likes of Wilco, The Black Keys, Elvis Costello, Tom Petty, and Nick Lowe. Baartmans also draws energy from the performances of emerging Dutch bands. The opening track, The Other Side, sets the tone with relaxed Americana vibes reminiscent of Steve Forbert's dry and hoarse vocal style. Throughout the album, Baartmans showcases his virtuoso guitar skills, as seen in the melodic up-tempo, Room 242 and the beautiful Americana of Chasing Dreams. Collaborations shine in tracks like The Fall and Old Habits Die Hard, where Johan Jansen's pedal steel and Rob Geboers' keys add depth. The rhythm section, led by Sjoerd van Bommel's excellent drumming, elevates the country-rock with reggae influences in Your Only. Zen Master stands out with heavy country rock elements and a captivating organ solo. Baartmans contributes drumming and soulful vocals on the tune, Solid Ground. His admiration for Nick Lowe is evident in the pub rocker Bootleg Companion, showcasing exceptional guitar work. The album closes with She Just Knows, where Baartmans once again demonstrates his stellar guitar prowess. Ghostwriter, encapsulates Baartmans' musical evolution, delivering a diverse and captivating collection of songs.

COLIN CAMPBELL

AMIGO THE DEVIL

YOURS UNTIL THE WAR IS OVER

Regime Music Group

Amigo The Devil's latest release is a raw and haunting exploration of the human experience. With his distinctive blend of folk, Americana, blues flavoured styles and dark storytelling, Amigo The Devil, also known as Danny Kiranos, delivers thirteen original songs that are altogether emotionally gripping and musically captivating. From the opening track, Hanging By The Roots, listeners are drawn into a world where darkness and light intermingle seamlessly. Kiranos' gravelly voice, accompanied by sparse instrumentation, sets the tone for what lies ahead. Each song on the album feels like a journey into the depths of the human psyche, with themes

> *A masterpiece of musical styles, poetic lyrics, just amazing*

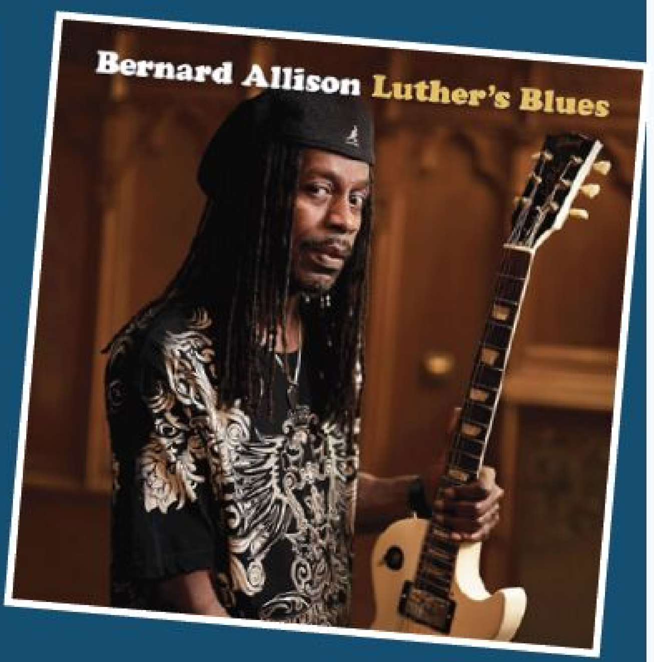
ranging from love and loss to redemption and mortality. One of the standout tracks on the album is The Mechanic, drenched with emotion and regret he is a consummate storyteller who sucks you into the lyrics with an alluring visceral vocal. Kiranos' poignant lyrics and evocative imagery throughout this release make it a soundscape of emotional distortion. Death seems a theme and the haunting lyrics of Garden Of Leaving will stay with the listener for a long time. Just listen to Cannibal Within, the lyrics are so dark. Another highlight is I'm Going To Heaven a poignant meditation on the passage of time and the inevitability of death but with a twist in the tale. Ultimately, this release is a testament to Amigo The Devil's talent as a storyteller and musician. With its haunting melodies, evocative lyrics, and raw emotional depth, the album is sure to resonate with listeners long after the final notes fade away. A masterpiece of musical styles, poetic lyrics, just amazing.

COLIN CAMPBELL

NEW ALBUM OUT NOW

JENNIFERPORTERMUSIC.COM

BERNARD ALLISON



LUTHER'S BLUES

Ruf Records

Sometimes, artists can want to move out of their illustrious parent's shadow and forge their own musical identity. Other can be proud of their heritage and seek to keep it alive. Bernard Allison does both. Luther Allison was simultaneously one of the last of the old-style bluesmen and one of the first of the new. He grew up in the West side Chicago style of Otis Rush, Magic Sam, and others, but forged his own way, even settling in Europe and establishing a wider, more modern, and more cosmopolitan approach to the blues, whilst keeping within the tradition. After all, he was the only bluesman signed to the Motown conglomerate at one time.

To mark Ruf Records thirtieth anniversary, and more than three decades since Luther's son Bernard debuted on record, he and boss Thomas Ruf have assembled this double CD. Bernard has said he will always include one or two of his dad's songs on his albums. This release collects up twenty of them from across Bernard's previous releases and remastered them. It's an impressive collection of modern blues. Hang On ensures the set opens with an accurate, muscular Jimi Hendrix tribute (both vocally and musically) and it closes with the quiet, wistful, acoustic Castle. In between are tracks like the mellow soul-tinged Reaching Out, the modern funk-tinted blues of Too Many Women, the contemporary approach of Into My Life, such strong blues as Bad Love, the rocking Help, and the telling, shuffling Move From The Hood. There are plenty of rock-, funk- and soul-inflected numbers, ensuring a high and consistent level of performance, though the second CD has an overall more traditional blues sound. Both approaches are equally valid, and Bernard does both perfectly.

NORMAN DARWEN

BRAD "GUITAR" WILSON

BUCKLE UP

Call Bee Music

Any artist with "GUITAR" in their name conjures up images of fiery fret work, blazing licks and an "in your face" approach to his music. For his seventh album, California based Wilson recorded partly in The Netherlands and partly in California. Opening track Lucille is a self-penned stomper which lives up to the billing with sparkling guitar from Wilson and wonderful barroom piano from Chris Rhyne. Next up is a nicely relaxed cover of the Stones classic You Can't Always Get What You Want featuring bass player Deb Jacobs joining Wilson on a tasty soulful vocal duet. The blues-rocking Hoodoo Party does what it says on the tin with biting guitar licks and urgent vocals and the whole band enjoying themselves hugely in a race to the finish. Wilson gets plenty of space to stretch out with his more sensitive guitar skills on the loping, lazy shuffle of Hound Dog. Title track Buckle Up crashes out of the speakers and goes straight for the jugular. The classic slow blues Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out features yearning vocals and, of course, plenty of shiny, but tasteful guitar work. Voodoo Boogie is a frantic blues-rocker but things slow down for the heartfelt ballad My Own Hill To Climb with Wilson's resigned vocal and guitar set against swelling organ. Blues rockers will appreciate the great material, excellent band and high-end production topped off by Wilson's charismatic guitar and vocals. A cover of the Albert King favourite Born Under A Bad Sign with that instantly familiar ominous guitar riff is performed as a funky vocal duet with Deb Jacobs. West Coast Girl is a catchy, country flavoured, pop song followed by the energy packed rocker Step By Step featuring driving guitar and wailing harmonica. This fine album closes with the brassy, hard grooving number Hit It.

DAVE DRURY

BREAKIN' NEWS

TEN YEARS OF BLUES

Nola Blues

For a young label NOLA Blue has made quite an impact over the last decade and this ten-track sampler shows why, with an impressive mix of styles, blending older musicians with some young enough to be their grandchildren! The label started out with the release of Freddie King's younger brother Benny Turner's Journey album and we hear three cuts from him: Breakin' News from that initial release opens proceedings with a blast of slide guitar and a full horn arrangement; Benny plays bass and adds backing vocals to Cash McCall's version of It Hurts Me Too (Billy Branch on harp and the wonderfully named Butch Mudbone on slide); the album closes with a single released in 2019, Who Sang It First, Benny's soulful vocals framed by the classic sound of Muscle Shoals. Arguably their best-known artist, John Nemeth, appears twice, on the gospel-soaked traditional tune The Last Time and with the Lovelight Orchestra on the effortlessly swinging After All, the horns adding drive and glamour. Veteran soul singer Frank Bey issued his final album on NOLA Blue and the autobiographical title track All My Dues Are Paid is an excellent inclusion, with another fine horn chart. Another veteran, Texas' Trudy Lynn, had her greatest success yet with Golden Girl, the title track a solid shuffle with father and son Kevin and Yates McKendree shining on keys and guitar respectively. Another veteran, familiar to UK audiences from regular visits here, is Lil' Jimmy Reed whose Back To Baton Rouge collaboration with upcoming pianist Ben Levin was a great success for the label in 2023, here represented by the autobiographical They Call Me Lil' Jimmy. Singles from Clarence Spady and Cash McCall complete the ten tracks. Anyone unfamiliar with the label's output could do worse than sit down and listen to this disc; that will probably result in you acquiring several of these albums for your collection, there is some great stuff here!

JOHN MITCHELL

Laura Carbone

CEDRIC BURNSIDE

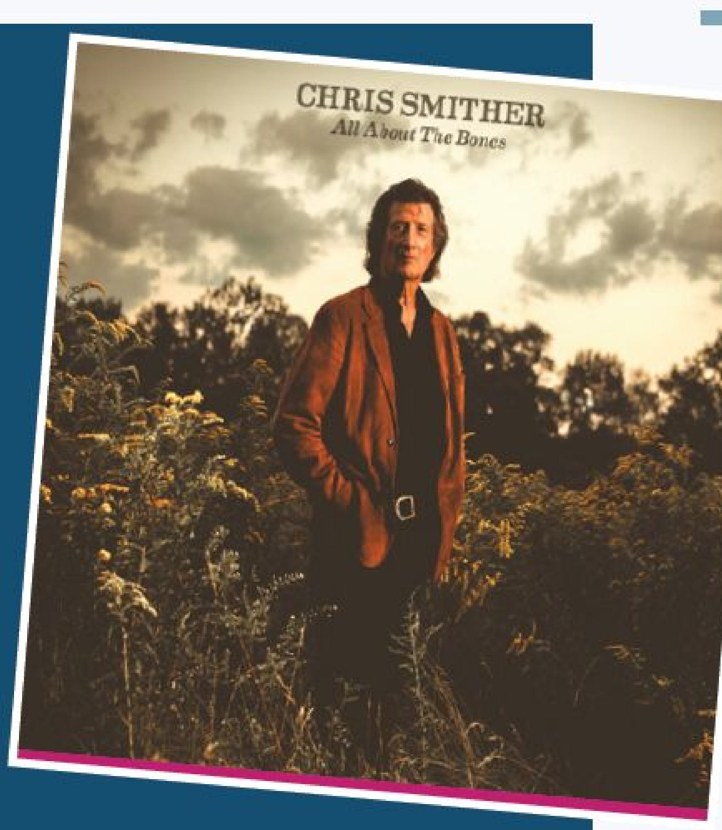
HILL COUNTRY LOVE

Provogue Records

Cedric Burnside's musical journey

CHRIS SMITHER

ALL ABOUT THE BONES



Signature Sounds

Smither's latest, his twentieth, offering drops early May. Always worth catching, this is probably the truly finest and clever lyricist working today in the USA. As usual, his voice is mellow but gritty while his guitar fretwork is deliciously grabbing and yet understated – a typical Smither gambit, joined by his foot-slipping and sliding.

> *streaks of blues, funk and modern Americana*

Covering all the usual bases we expect, Smither has a dark feel here with politics, love, loss, vulnerability, wit and astute observation, often biting at times, clearly shining out throughout the release. On All About The Bones, Smither is joined by Chris Cheek on soulful sax, BettySoo on excellent harmony vocals, Zac Trojano on drums and his long)-time studio buddy and producer David Goodrich. The ensemble works seamlessly like a bunch of old seasoned pros having fun together. Smither has a remarkable knack for delivering hugely enjoyable, interesting and at times down-right cheeky, tongue-in-cheek albums, steeped in deep southern, NOLA-rich aroma. Here, he's done it again in his usual inimitable way. Another absolute winner on the cards with streaks of blues, funk and modern Americana rippling along perfectly.

IAIN PATIENCE

reaches new heights with his latest album. This is a powerful testament to his family's legacy and his innovative spirit. Following his Grammy-winning success with I Be Trying in 2021, Burnside cements his status not only as a torchbearer of Hill Country blues but as a modern interpreter of the genre. This reaches deep into Burnside's life, presenting an intimate portrayal of his experiences, struggles, and victories. Each of the fourteen tracks resonate with authenticity, offering a contemporary twist on traditional blues while honouring its roots. Burnside's evolution from his grandfather's band to a celebrated artist reflects his unwavering dedication to the blues tradition. This includes standout titles like I Know, Shake 'Em On Down, and Po Black Mattie, exploring the unique nuances of Hill Country blues, infused with Burnside's personal experiences. Recorded in an old building intended to be Burnside's juke joint; the album captures a soulful and gritty aesthetic, thanks to the collaborative production efforts of Burnside and Luther Dickinson. The title track, Hill Country Love, serves as a poignant tribute to Burnside's roots and journey and sets the tone for an immersive musical experience. The album's completion in a remarkable two-day session underscores the spontaneity and raw energy that defines Burnside's music. This release is a testament to resilience, evolution, and the enduring power of family heritage in shaping musical legacies. A must for any blues music enthusiast, raw unfiltered traditional core music full of stomping good tunes and feelgood vibes throughout.

COLIN CAMPBELL

DAVE KELLY

SUN ON MY FACE

Repertoire Records

Best known for his work with The Blues Band, the guitarist and singer Dave Kelly tackles a fair few songs from outside the blues genre on Sun On My Face. With his vocals and guitar prowess pushed to the fore, and with sterling support from a series of talented musicians, he is joined by Blues Band colleague Paul Jones on Harmonica for a spirted run-through of Mean Old Frisco Blues and the well-known jazz standard A Nightingale Sang in Berkely Square. Although there are some songs on here that wouldn't naturally suggest themselves for a bluesy treatment, Cole Porter's Let's Fall in Love and My Girl by The Temptations sound good with the treatments they are given, with the later, with its melodic slide guitar fills, giving something of the Rhythm and Blues sound of middle period Ry Cooder. John Denver's Take Me Home Country Roads is a slow reverie with Kelly's inspired, reflective vocals being perfectly matched by his keening slide guitar. The closing track, the original I am The Blues is a light JJ Cale like romp with funky rhythm guitars and Hammond Organ pushed to the fore. The album is a well put together mixture of styles with Dave Kelly's singing, and authoritative guitar pushed to the fore. It shows one of the more esteemed figures on the British Blues scene in fine form, and perhaps helps to show the versatility that the blues can have in tackling the less immediately bluesy songs out there.

BEN MACNAIR

DAN HICKS & HIS HOT LICKS

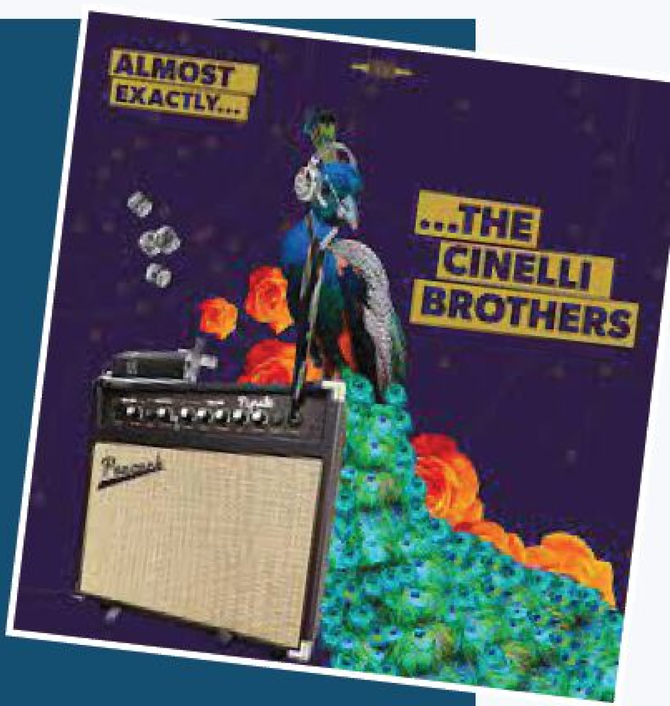
LIVE IN L.A. 1973

Floating World Records

The album was recorded at The Boarding House for the KMPX-FM Radio Station. The Boarding House was a venue that catered to Music and Comedy based

THE CINELLI BROTHERS

ALMOST EXACTLY



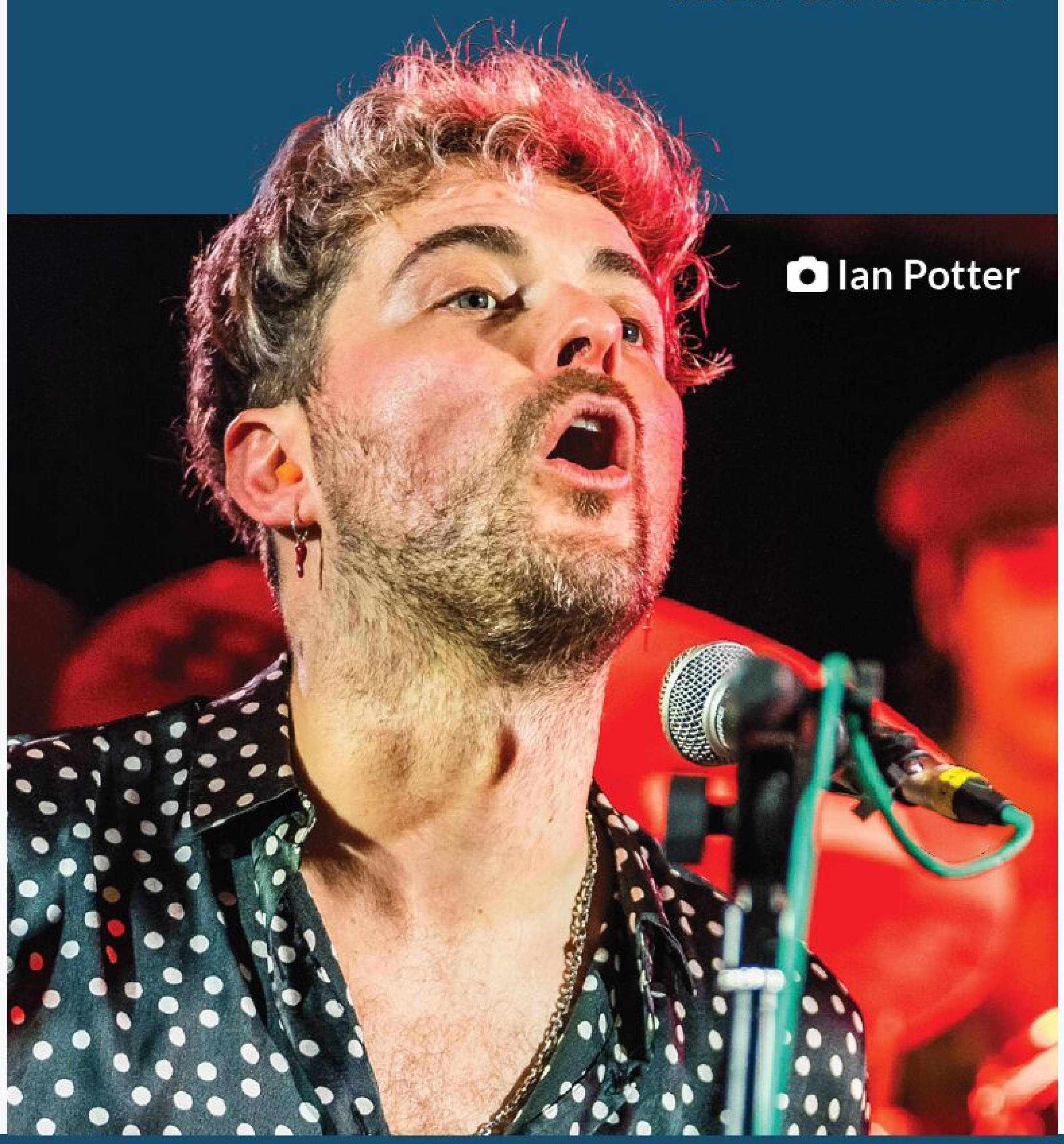
Independent

Almost Exactly marks the fourth studio album by The Cinelli Brothers, highlighting a significant evolution in their sound. Notably, the collaboration between band producer Marco Cinelli and acclaimed drummer Rich Pagano has played a pivotal role in shaping this musical journey. Pagano, drawn to the band's European roots and impressed by their International Blues Challenge success, joined forces with them, bringing a fresh perspective to their music. The decision to move away from a strictly blues-oriented, self-produced approach led the band to Applehead Recording Studio in Woodstock, New York. Here, a week of collaborative studio time resulted in a fusion of Pagano's melodic, songwriter-focused production and Cinelli's groove-oriented, improvisational contributions. The album reflects a unique blend of soul, blues, and roots rock, with a notable incorporation of Marco's expanded keyboard skills. Co-writing became a significant method for song creation, involving contributions from friends and colleagues. Influences such as The Beatles, The Band, The Rascals, and Southern Soul from the '60s and '70s shaped the album's diverse yet cohesive sound. This release captures a moment of

> *a unique blend of soul, blues, and roots rock*

dynamic creativity, portraying The Cinelli Brothers in a soulfully honest phase of their musical journey. Last Throw Of The Dice opens this release, funky soul vibes here. Dozen Roses has a mellow laid-back timbre, harmonies excellent also. Ain't Blue But I Sigh, has a Latino feel on this one, punctuated with harmonica tones and overlays of pure musical sophistication. Nobody's Fool sees the band's dark side, ethereal tale. Prayer, encapsulates an all-round full fat sound of this band, all sharing vocals, gospel meets blues. Last tune, Fools Paradise, brings some more soul and great riffs.

COLIN CAMPBELL



Ian Potter

JJ GREY AND MOFRO

OLUSTEE

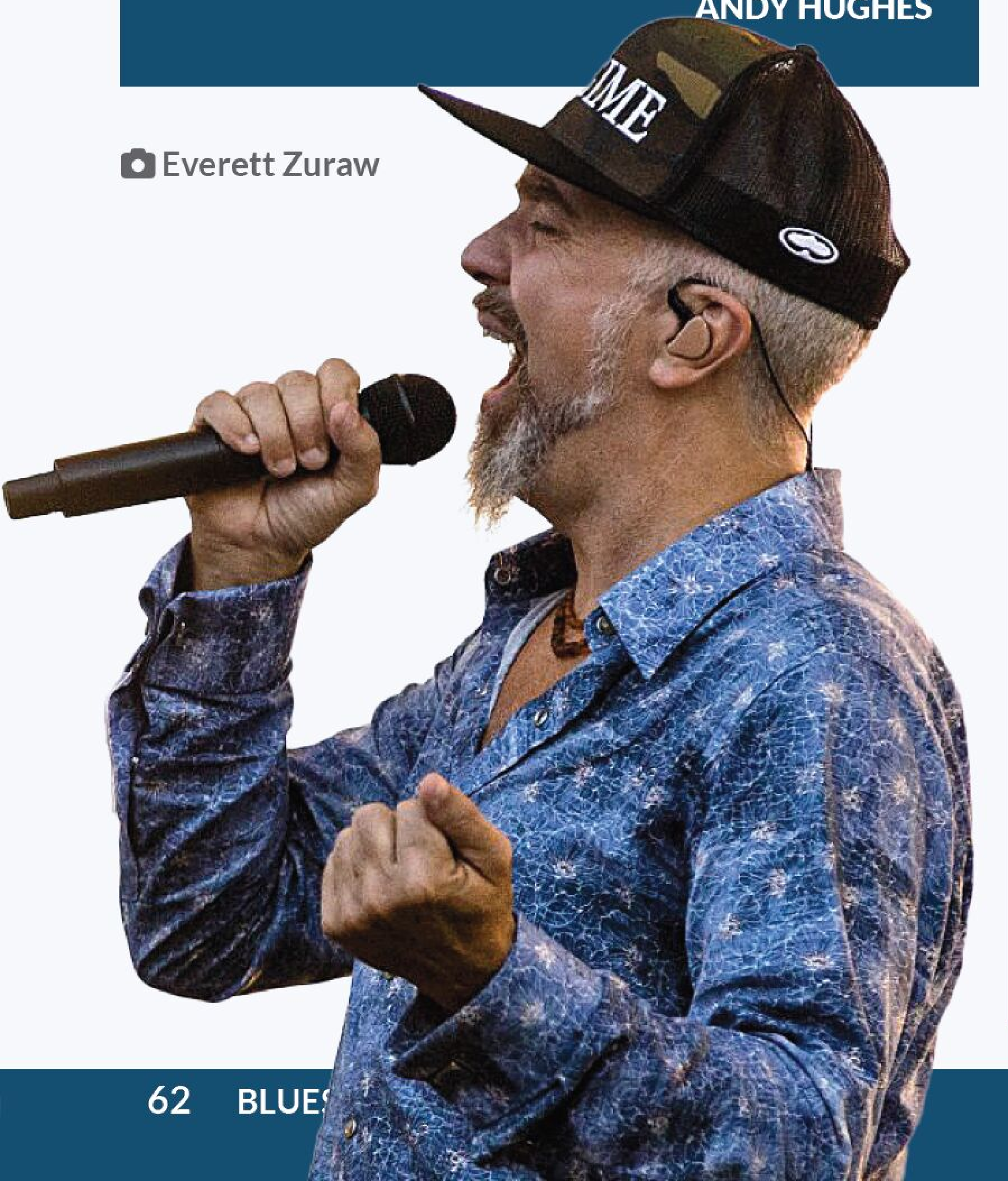
Alligator Records

A welcome return to recording, accompanied by a resumption in touring makes fans of JJ Grey And Mofro excited. And it should. On the basis of this collection, and the live shows that will be built around it, this is a wonderful evening to be had by old and new fans alike. The shining glory that permeates every single moment of this album is the voice of JJ Grey. It truly is a thing of wonder, with its endless range of vocal technique and emotional impact. And unsurprisingly, the entire collection of songs is built as ae musical bed for that wonderful voice to lie on, and occasionally stand up and raise the proverbial roof as well. Starting out with a slow burning song, The Sea sets the tone for the rest of the album. Impeccable production and arrangements come together seamlessly to create a masterpiece of songcraft and soulful delivery. The next song On A Breeze shows that this is a template for the album, a slow start, and a build-up with the rest of the band, and the peerless backing vocals all blending in to take the whole thing home.

> *heading into my Top Five albums for the year*

It's not all southern soul though, the title track rocks it up nicely, and Wonderland is some hot-buttered boogie that only southern bands can do well. Rooster is an unashamed hymn to the Southern Man, and all the metaphors you'd expect with a title like that are all in place. But the jewel in the crown is Waiting, and you have to marvel at just how much emotion one man can convey down a microphone and find it immortalised in the playing medium of your choice. It shows that in this world where music is far too often churned out by Frankenstein machines with anonymous interchangeable pop moppets, there is still a very large place at the top for a writer and singer who can craft songs like this. This is heading into my Top Five albums for the year, and its only March. Yes, that's how good it is.

ANDY HUGHES



Everett Zuraw

in San Francisco. In fact, Don Hicks originated from The Bay Area of San Francisco, so a hometown gig almost. The album falls into two parts, the first eight tracks, and what is billed as Bonus tracks, of which there are nine. Not sure why they didn't just list all tracks 1-17, but hey ho, it's no big deal. As I started to listen to the album, I thought, how do I describe this particular album, you certainly can't pigeon-hole it. It's a broad canvas of Blues, Country, Country Blues, Jazz, Rag Time, and everything in between. So let us start at the beginning, this is not so much a band as an ensemble, an ensemble of singers and musicians coming from many different parts, and many different influences, but who all arrive at the station at the right time. Walkin' One And Only is the kind of song that you don't know where it will take you, which kind of sums up the whole live album, that's the beauty of it, where in the hell will I end up? Keep Playing With My Mind ft, Naomi Eisenberg on lead vocals, is as sweet as can be. The harmonies on the album are truly magnificent, but on this particular track, they're simply sublime. Another appealing trait is the fact that Don Hicks can tell stories through songs, not unusual, but having the ability to change his vocal approach to suit the mood of the story, is a different thing altogether. This album is full of quirky, often amusing stories wrapped around great musicianship. Tangled Tales incorporates Jazz with amazing Scatt singing, another twist on the musical highway of the album. This is not an album that will set the world on fire, it's not an album that will have you shaking what your mama gave you, it's an album that reminds you of the simplicity of music that can be so effective. So, if you love Blues, Country, Jazz, Rag Time, and humour, then this album is right up your musical alley. I love it.

STEPHEN HARRISON

JON SLIDEWELL & THE REEDCUTTERS

SOMEONE NEW

Palatine Recordings

I have previously heard recordings by the Reedcutters knocking out lively, energetic covers of R&B classics by Willie Dixon, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley and Elmore James etc. They have now added Jon Slidewell to their name and produced a 5 track EP of new material all penned by Slidewell but still describe themselves as playing "Old school R&B Blues music". Opener So In Love is a chunky Feelgoods style rocker featuring speedy guitar chops, sturdy vocals and wailing harmonica from Slidewell. Title track Someone New features slashing slide guitar and aggressive vocals as Slidewell states "I'm going home to find myself and maybe someone new". This is no frills, in your face Blues/R&B full of raw energy and enthusiasm which brings joy to the heart. Catch them live if you get the chance. The pace drops for The Devil's Make a slow loping blues lament featuring acoustic guitar, yearning vocals and blues wailing harp as Slidewell states "She's got the voice of an angel but the tongue of a snake". In stark contrast to the previous number The Girl Next Door is a jaunty, upbeat, toe tapping ditty featuring Jake Poole on lead guitar and Leigh Eaton on drums. Closing track Love Disfigured Me rounds off this brief excursion into what the band call "Old Skool R&B". A very enjoyable listen and I look forward to a full album of stonking, passionate songs which never outstay their welcome and are all under three minutes.

DAVE DRURY

EMANUEL CASABLANCA

STRUNG OUT

ON THRILLS

Vinyl Recording Group

In the realm of grooves and guitar riffs, Brooklyn's Emanual Casablanca's second album has bass-heavy rhythms that immediately seize the listener's attention. Teaming up with co-producer Paul Howells, he channels the energy laid down by Julian Chabot and Sam Lazarev, capturing it with guttural, reverberating style on these eight tracks. It serves as a solid foundation for a musical journey that explores themes of love, thrill-seeking, and the complexities of human relationships. The opening track, Dogshit, sets the tone with a grinding tune about a deceitful woman, amplified by the sizzling slide playing of guest guitarist Joanna Connor. The title track follows suit with a swagger as Casablanca, discovering that the thrill he truly craves is love. Visceral, delves into a more soulful exploration, with Casablanca's vocals sweet and sultry and lyrical guitar tones. The Farm, changes the pace, some intricate guitar work here. Tracks like King and Pistolero, deliver a rocking strut, showcasing his assertive vocals and superb guitar tones. The eclectic mix continues with Lass, a tale of a gunslinger complemented by the Hispanic flair of Salvo's guitar work. Casablanca's vocal versatility injects

plenty of character into his songs. Throughout the album, Casablanca keeps things interesting with surprises like the swampy guitar tone in Bastard. The slide guitar of Elliott Sharp is a highlight on Morning Wood. The rapping funky song Pearl is a joy. The bonus track, My Life's Fire, has an acoustic-oriented vibe, showcasing Casablanca's range. This release is a nuanced album that grows on you, showcasing Casablanca's potential as a compelling artist in the blues scene. While not a household name yet, he's undoubtedly one to keep an eye on.

COLIN CAMPBELL

HANNAH WICKLUND
THE PRIZE
Strawberry Moon Records

Nashville-based singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist Hannah Wicklund new ten track release, signals a departure from the earthy rock sound of her 2018 debut. Collaborating with Greta Van Fleet's Sam Kiszka on bass, keys, organ, and production, alongside drummer Daniel Wagner, the album explores a diverse sonic palette. This release showcases classic rock influences, notably on tracks like the atmospheric Hell In The Hallway and the dynamic Hide and Seek, where Hannah's powerful vocals and impassioned guitar solos take centre stage. The album's standout is Dark Passenger, which entwines a compelling tonal dynamic, seamlessly transitioning from jazzy blues to a wall of guitars and pounding drums. Wicklund's meticulous craftsmanship is evident throughout the album, resulting in a textured, softer sound. Tracks like; Intervention, features a minimalist bluesy shuffle. Whilst Lost Love weaves lush folk melodies with poignant reflections on past lovers. The rootsy rock ballad Can't Get Enough with its mournful strings and lovesick lyrics stands out as a charmingly melancholic piece. The cen-

JUDITH HILL
LETTERS FROM A BLACK WIDOW

Regime Music Group

The soul-funk song cycle, reminiscent of classics like Inner Visions and What's Goin' On, unfolds as a theatrical narrative, transitioning from private pain to communal transcendence in twelve songs. Flame captures Hill's antihero energy, channelling the raw vocal power of a young Aretha Franklin as she defiantly declares her resilience amidst chaos and pain. Throughout the album, she draws on her personal experiences, addressing themes of guilt, shame, and paranoia, which she likens to a cancer growing within. Collaborating with opera/theatre director Alexander Gedeon, Hill injects theatrical experimentation into her work, reaching emotional peaks in the titular track, "Black Widow," where she confronts the haunting figure of her past.

The musical prowess displayed in the album is evident in searing guitar solos, a skill Hill recently acquired during the songwriting process. Hill's writing style varies, ranging from scenes reminiscent of movie scripts to groove-driven compositions born out of her interactions with the guitar or bass.

> *blues with insightful lyricism and innovative arrangements*

Funk-infused tracks like, My Whole Life Is in the Wrong Key and Downtown Boogie marry playful metaphor with sonic complexity, showcasing Hill's ability to explore diverse musical spaces.

The album's social consciousness comes to the forefront in We Are the Power, that emphasises the internal reservoirs of strength and defiance even when external circumstances seem oppressive. The emotionally charged track, Touch, is a bluesy soul ballad, organ and backing vocals are sublime, rising this song to another level. This release encapsulates Hill's multifaceted approach to storytelling, blending soul, funk, and blues with insightful lyricism and innovative arrangements.

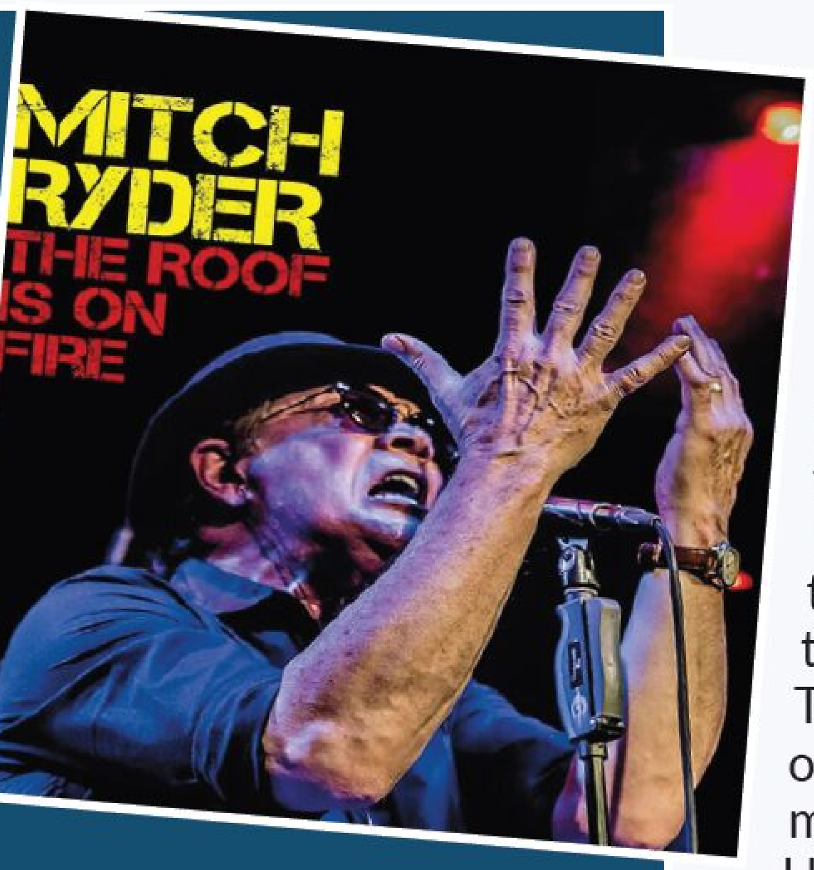
COLIN CAMPBELL

Ginger Sole

MITCH RYDER

THE ROOF IS ON FIRE

Ruf Records



Veteran blues and soul rocker Mitch Ryder releases an album to coincide with his seventy-fifth birthday, while acknowledging in the sleeve notes that age is irrelevant. Mr Ryder has been around a while and has a solid reputation with our Northern Soul friends for whom his classic stompers Breakout and You Get Your Kicks. Similarly, his dust-churning Devil With The Blue Dress was a long-term crowd-pleaser in the high-octane live turnouts for Bruce Springsteen. With form like that, it's no surprise that Mitch has cornered a successful market in up-and-at-it blues rock for the masses. His enviable reputation as a live performer has been a mainstay, especially in Europe. Which explains the recording

> *plays to people who understand the world*

and release of this double album of songs recorded on tour in Germany with the veteran combo that Mitch likes to hang out with when he's over that way. His rockin' version of Dylan's Subterranean Homesick Blues proves the adage that a good song is a good song in whatever style and format you play it. The irony of the funky Ain't Nobody White will probably be lost on any snowflake mimsies who come across it, but that's not Mitch's demographic. He plays to people who understand the world a little and know when a little humour makes a good point, and a great song. The disc has two sections, a rockin' and rootin' selection of songs, and a slow blues disc, where Mitch's mature and world-weary voice is wonderfully backed up by his sterling band. The stand-out here is Jimmy Cliff's monumental Many Rivers To Cross which should only ever be reserved for vocalists with the chops and the life experience to make it sound as lived-in as it should. The album finishes with a wonderful song, Soul Kitchen, rounding off an excellent example of the talent of Mich Ryder. Whether he is stomping and hollarin' or croonin' and bloozin' the voice is still present and correct, the band is top notch, and clearly a good time was had by all. Would have loved Devil In the Blue Dress maybe next time.

ANDY HUGHES

Georg Pieron

trepiece ballad, Song Bird Sing, relies on a simple arrangement of gentle guitar and Wicklund's commanding vocals. While the album impresses with its blues, pop, and rock fusion, some tracks like the orchestral title track, The Prize, and the sweeping ballad Sun To Sun tend to verge on overpowering sentimentality. Nevertheless, Hannah Wicklund's second album stands as a polished collection, highlighting her powerful vocals and songwriting prowess across a spectrum of emotions. Eclectic, clever song writing and production, a tonic for the soul.

COLIN CAMPBELL

OIL CITY SHAKERS

ROUGH 'N' READY

Badlands Inc

Oil City Shakers is the name of a duo out of Tyneside in the northeast of England, though you might not guess that from this raw, down-home sounding blues set. Just Bab Bob Bates on lived-in vocals and dirty guitar, with Ronnie Semple on gutsy, low-down harmonica. Looking at the Facebook page, these guys love to play for the dancers, and this varied set shows just why they're popular. There is a wide range of material here. I'm guessing that Little Red Rooster draws more from the Rolling Stones version rather than Howling Wolf's, and that would certainly fit in with much of the rest of the material. It's all blues and blues-rock, more or less, and includes older numbers such as Led Zeppelin's Rock N Roll (oddly, the only track here less than a hundred percent successful, it does miss John Bonham's drumming), Canned Heat's On The Road Again, and Bob Dylan's Tom Thumb Blues. You also get George Thorogood's Delaware Slide and Motorhead's Ace Of Spades(!) More recent items include The Alabama Shakes Hold On, Buddy & Julie Miller's Gasoline And Matches (maybe Le Ann Rimes version with Jeff Beck) and Tedeschi-Trucks' Midnight In Harlem. That is a fair old spread, but Benjamin had been struggling with some group work last week but said he has now sorted this out and wanted to put it behind him, not wanting to talk about it. He said that now it is over, he feels OK. Speaking of which, closing track Bruce Richard Reynolds is about the great train robber, not the kind of thing you'd expect, but it was done by The Alabama 3,

NORMAN DARWEN

PATTI PARKS WITH JOHNNY RAWLS

COME SING WITH ME

Vizztone

The title of the album could not be more appropriate, a gathering of so many musicians and songwriters, this album is a collective production of some of the finest tunes I've heard in a long time. The album is mainly based on Blues and Soul, with the occasional dip into Gospel which suits the vocal talents of Patti Parks so well. As well as having Johnny Rawls sharing a lot of the vocal duties and writing on a couple of songs, Patti is also joined by her husband, Guy Nirelli, who also acts as one of the main songwriters. The opening track, I'm In Love With You Baby, written by Johnny Rawls and Guy Nirelli, is such a sweet soul ballad, a true love song in every sense of the word, but not in a sloppy kind of way, just a genuine love song delivered with passion and emotion. As well as being joined by her husband and Johnny Rawls, Patti has enlisted Vizztone Co-Owner and musician, Richard Rosenblatt on Harmonica and Blues keyboard player, Anthony Geraci. So this is a bonafide collection of very close friends, not just a bunch of musicians hired to do a record. Sing Around The World (Nirelli & Parks), reminds me of an early 70s soul with more than a hint of Gospel. Patti Parks has the perfect voice for this kind of music, as well as being able to sing the Blues, which is not as easy as it may sound, but with the backing of musicians of this calibre, it almost sounds orchestral. DJs Boogie (I Like To Boogie) does exactly what it says on the tin. A down and dirty Boogie Woogie shake your ass type of tune, that will have you on the floor giving it your best moves. I'm going to stick my neck out here, I think this album could be a serious contender for album of the year already. It's that good, don't believe me? Buy it, you'll soon come to the same conclusion.

STEPHEN HARRISON

PAUL REED SMITH–EIGHTLOCK

LIONS ROARING IN QUICKSAND

Steele Records

Internationally acclaimed guitar maker Paul Reed Smith collaborates with his ensemble Eightlock, a collective of eight musicians, on their debut album. This fourteen track musical odyssey blends elements of Baltimore funk, DC go-go, and New Orleans swing, creating a rich tapestry of blues, soul, rock, funk, and other genres. Produced by Paul Reed Smith, the album opens with the soulful vocals of Mia Samone on the track, Sarah. Mia's vocals are reminiscent of Carmen McRae, and presented in a tight progressive funk jazz style, crafting a unique musical amalgamation. While embracing a retro beat, the album maintains a contemporary allure, there is a cohesive coolness in each performance by the ensemble. Mia's vocals, featuring clean intonation and phrasing, diverge from rock aggression, opting for a soulful refinement evident in tracks like I'm Ready. Mia's lyrical nuances infuse the album, creating a soulfully sultry ambiance reminiscent of Lena Horne. The production, adorned with Mia's articulate vocals, vivid guitars, and lively drums, explores diverse moods, including the jazzy-blues depth on the track ,99. Drivin' At Night has a bluesy feel. Look At The Moon has great harmonies, and the narration blends the song together. Echoes is another highlight it sucks the listener in and is so comforting, a blanket

of soul vibes. The group features stellar musicians such as Gary Grainger, Gregory Grainger, Dennis Chambers, Juju House, Bill Nelson, Mike Ault, Chuck Brown, Sugar Bear Elliott, Benjie Perecki, and Gregg Erwin, collectively contribute to the album's overall success and includes three drummers. This is truly a musical work of art so many layers and flavours, just brilliant.

COLIN CAMPBELL

PETER VETESKA AND THE BLUES TRAIN

FULL TILT

Blue Heart Records

This USA Blues band formed in 2013 are led by Peter Veteska on Guitar/ Vocals and are certainly prolific, this release being their seventh in the past eight years, On listening to this, their latest album, you can understand why they have been able to do this as they have a slick sound and ability to write some excellent material which is keeping their fans very content. On this twelve-track album they have included eight originals. The nucleus of the band supporting Peter are Keyboard player Jeff Levine, drummer Alex D'Agnese and Bassist Coo Moe Jhee who perform as a very tight unit with a 'bucket full' of energy. This is particularly evident on the opening track, Go Find Another Man, where guest Harmonica player Mikey Jr joins in on the fun with some blistering playing alongside some thumping Hammond Organ. This is soon followed by a slow blues number Sad and Blue on which Peter highlights his excellent lead guitar work accompanying his emotive vocal. The cover material is an interesting mix, the cover of the little-known Beatles song One After 909 comes across with a touch of Rock n Roll included while Peter's rendition of the 1923 classic song Nobody Knows You (When You're Down and Out) is sublime and full of emotion with Jeff Levine's Piano to the fore. There is even a Christmas song to close the album with a rousing version of Merry Christmas Baby. Overall, this is a good mix of Rocking style Blues with the occasional slow blues numbers thrown in for good measure, the recordings were produced "live" in the Studio with minimal overdubs, highlighting what a great musical band Peter Veteska and The Blues Train are.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

PHIL COYNE & THE WAYWARD ACES

SOUND AND FURY

Independent

This is a six-tracker (26 minutes) from this Australian trio. Recorded in one take on one track tape, this is raw and powerful stuff as eponymous leader Phil sings and blows harp, supported by guitarist Oscar Ladell and drummer Will Harris. The PR sheet describes the music as "Michigan Avenue circa 1954 plugged into London circa 1977" and that's a fair description as the first two tracks rattle along: Brother has Oscar's core riff, Phil's harp filling the spaces as Will gets up a good head of steam behind them; I'm Gone follows in similar vein, with Phil's gritty vocals and piercing harp to the fore. The band drops the pace a little for the other two originals, FU Blues pulling no punches and is definitely not lyrically radio-friendly! It also features some tough harp work, almost distorted at times, not the easiest listen. In contrast the music on the final original fits the title Sweet Little Riff as the band takes its time and Phil blows some far more melodic harp and sings more gently. Alongside these four cuts are two covers: How Many More Years has heavy guitar and strident vocals, very much in keeping with both Howling Wolf's original and Led Zeppelin's cover; Ray Charles' Blackjack brings a slightly funkier approach as drummer Will lays down some different rhythms on the intro before Phil adds his trademark gritty harp and vocals.

JOHN MITCHELL

POPA CHUBBY & THE BEAST BAND

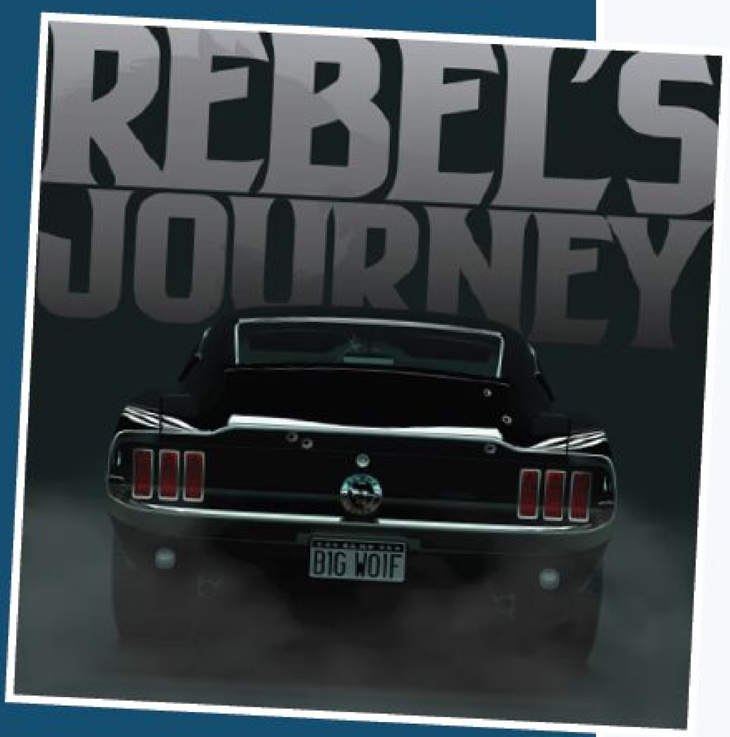
LIVE AT G. BLUEYS JUKE JOINT NYC

Gulf Coast Records

Contrary to its club setting, G. Bluey's is revealed to be a sophisticated sound studio where Popa collaborates with soundman Glen Forrest. The two-night recording session in front of 25 guests per night captures the essence of a Popa Chubby performance, displaying his guitar prowess and powerful vocals. The album serves as a

Tears of Fire

BIG WOLF BAND



REBEL'S JOURNEY

Independent

This latest release is a captivating musical odyssey that seamlessly melds blues and rock influences into a cohesive sonic narrative. This album solidifies the band's standing in the contemporary blues-rock scene. From the outset, the opening track, Empire And A Prayer, sets the tone with its gritty guitar riffs and commanding vocals from frontman Jonathan Earp. The band's raw energy is palpable, drawing listeners into a world where rebellion and musical prowess collide especially noted on the anthemic, Rise Together. The album's production is pristine, allowing each instrument to shine while maintaining an authentic live sound. Tracks like Black Dog Blues highlight the band's versatility, seamlessly transitioning from soulful blues verses to explosive, guitar-driven choruses with some mighty keyboard playing and Zoe Green adds great backing vocals. The rhythm section, comprised of Mick Jaynes on bass and Tim Jones on drums, provides a rock-solid foundation throughout, whilst Robin Fox's keyboard work adds depth and texture to the overall sound. Earp's songwriting prowess is evident in the powerfully emotional Standing In The Rain, a particular favourite. Living On Borrowed Time is where heartfelt lyrics and soulful guitar solos intertwine, creating a poignant ballad that resonates with emotion. The album's diversity is further highlighted on Crazy Love, where the band delves into a slower, hypnotic bluesier groove.This release is a testament to Big Wolf Band's evolution and mastery of their craft. It pays homage to blues roots while boldly forging ahead with a contemporary edge, a melting pot of emotions, this band are on the rise a wonderful solid unit, great tunes highly recommended.

COLIN CAMPBELL

THE WICKED LO-DOWN

OUT OF LINE

Gulf Coast Records

The Wicked Lo-Down's second record, Out of Line, is a sonic adventure comprising eleven original tracks and two unexpected, rock-solid covers; Hound Dog Taylor's Just Can't Make It and a bluesy rendition of Britney Spears' Toxic, this is transformed into a fierce, rocking Texas shuffle with guest Monster Mike Welch's stellar guitar work. The album maintains a focus on songwriting, spotlighting the talents of both guitarists Jeffrey Berg and Paul Size, Nick David's excellent vocals and amazing harmonica tones. With a rhythm section comprising, Brad Hallen on bass; and Nick Toscano on drums, they solidify the band's distinctive sound. Fans of The Red Devils and the original Fabulous Thunderbirds will find this release a compelling addition to their collection. A notable track, The Wildest One (Lester's Boogie), serves as a tribute to the legendary Lester Butler. Initiated

> *an innovative blend of blues, rock & surprises*

by a riff reminiscent of Lester, contributed by bandmate Paul Size, the song pays homage to the late musician's life and music. Nick David's lyrics weave references to Butler's work, incorporating song titles from the Red Devils. This track stands as a poignant testament to the band's deep musical roots and appreciation for blues history. Another track, "Out of Line" showcases The Wicked Lo-Down's ability to transcend musical boundaries, here Mike Zito guests with a powerful guitar tone. With an emphasis on songcraft and a nod to blues legends, this release establishes the band's distinct presence in the contemporary music scene, making it a must-listen for enthusiasts seeking an innovative blend of blues, rock, and unexpected surprises.

COLIN CAMPBELL

quasi-greatest hits compilation, featuring expanded versions of his originals, familiar covers, and new renditions. Opening with an energetic nearly seven-minute rendition of Neil Young's Motorcycle Mama, the album also includes a heartfelt reflection in Another Ten Years Gone and a staple in Popa's performances, Hey Joe. The first disc features tracks like Dirty Lie and the jazzy 69 Dollars, while the instrumental Godfather Theme and a 14-minute rendition of Grown Man Crying Blues demonstrate the breadth of Popa's musical range.

The disc concludes with a show-stopping instrumental cover of Over the Rainbow. The second disc highlights the title track It's A Mighty Hard Road and rocks with I Don't Want Nobody. Slowing down with I Can't See the Light of Day, Popa highlights Michael's bass skills. The album also includes personal dedications like Embee's Song and a powerful cover of Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah. Closing with a unique combination of the Rolling Stones' Sympathy for the Devil and Chubby's spoken word Chubby's Story, the album encapsulates Popa Chubby's diverse musical style. Popa Chubby's reputation as a top performer in blues rock is reaffirmed through this album, highlighting his well-crafted songs, instrumental prowess, and compelling vocals. Despite greater recognition in Europe, the album stands as a testament to his enduring impact on the blues rock genre, inviting listeners to explore the rich musical tapestry he weaves.

COLIN CAMPBELL

SCOTT ASHWORTH

GHOSTS AND BROKEN MEN

Independent

Scott Ashworth's debut album unveils a tapestry of life's gritty narratives through eleven original tracks, ten of which stem from Ashworth's pen and one in collaboration with Mississippi wordsmith Billy Sayle. Within this musical narrative, Ashworth delves into universal themes of anguish, heartache, self-doubt, and addiction, yet amidst the turmoil, glimpses of redemption shine through. Musically, the album traverses the diverse landscapes of Americana, with nods to traditional country embellished by the mournful wail of pedal steel guitar, on songs like Ghost Writer. The soulful groove of Muscle Shoals Blues, on the opener Never See Light Again sets the tone and the gospel-infused richness of organ-led Americana on Pity Clown is pure class. Barry Frame's deft production ensures a seamless integration of these elements, with his own musical contributions enhancing the album's depth. Love Ain't Around Anymore is a beautiful ballad full of raw emotion, Scott's vocals are passionate and truthful. A stellar ensemble of musicians, including Dave Cantwell on drums, Iain Donald on bass, and Steven Hicken Jr. on pedal steel guitar, enriches the sonic tapestry. John Elliott's lead guitar work adds dynamism, while Andrew Alston's prowess on piano, organ, and harmonica injects soulful texture. Laura Begley's vocals, along with the

SLASH

ORGY OF THE DAMNED

Gibson Records

There's a hoary old saying, 'Don't meet your heroes...' if this were to be applied in musical terms then Orgy Of The Damned completely trashes this nonsensical proposition. It's an astonishing recording that rewards upon repeat playing, which is what any lover of the blues will unquestionably do. As the chief conspirator, Slash hasn't played safe with the songs and musical talent involved. He's made interesting pairings over these dozen tracks. With the backing tracks recorded with a live raw feel and vocalists nailing their parts in a few takes, this is a proper lesson in how old school methods work. As 100% proof, Beth Hart will blow the doors off any barn with her one take wonder on Stormy Monday.

> *Slash hasn't played safe with the songs and musical talent involved*

And Iggy Pop will make you run to a safe room and lock yourself in with his primal delivery on Lightnin' Hopkins' Awful Dream. Former Free/Bad Company legend Paul Rodgers delivers his classic blues-rock cool vocal on Born Under A Bad Sign. Opening tune, The Pusher, with The Black Crowes singer Chris Robinson impassioned cameo has an energy level powerful enough to blow the fuses on the national grid. Furthermore, listening to Gary Clark Jnr's tonality on Crossroad Blues, Chris Stapleton's drawl on Oh, Well and Demi Lovato holler on Papa Was A Rollin' Stone is to hear artists revel in being taken out of their comfort zone. Like Paul Rodgers, ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons adds his seemingly effortless trademark vocal and guitar sound to Hoochie Coochie Man. All the while, Slash plays from the front with his superb backing band of crack players. There are further audio treats in store... it's best you buy a copy and find all the above and even more surprises for yourself.

PAUL DAVIES

Gene Kirkland

horn section led by Andrew Hooley, Damian Cook, and Ben Cummings, further elevate the album's emotive impact. This release is more than a debut; it's a poignant exploration of the human experience, crafted with authenticity and delivered with raw sincerity. A master storyteller, it's all in the lyrics.

COLIN CAMPBELL

ERIC BIBB
LIVE AT THE SCALA THEATRE, STOCKHOLM
Stony Plain

Live at The Scala Theatre, is the latest offering from US-Swedish based acoustic bluesman Eric Bibb. It follows hot on the heels of his Grammy-nominated album Ridin' from 2023, which was probably one of his best recordings to date and garnered accolades worldwide. A difficult challenge therefore to better that and to deliver another winner but Bibb pulls it off in some style with a ten-track release that captures the spirit of the guy and his music perfectly in an electrifying live performance setting. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects here is Bibb returning to his own personal musical roots in so many, at times intimate sounding, ways. The material covered reflects much of the guy's own musical journey including the likes of traditional classics, Going Down the Road Feelin' Bad, 500 Miles, Bring Me Little Water, Sylvie and Mole in the Ground.The album features support from Christer Lysarides on guitar – an old Swedish pal of Bibb – and his Swedish wife, Ulrika Bibb on support vocals, a lady with a gorgeous vocal delivery in her own right and one that matches Bibb's own velvet tones to blissful near-perfectio. Anyone with a love of true traditional acoustic blues and roots music should get out a snag a copy of this further masterpiece from one of the genres greatest exponents.

IAIN PATIENCE

SMOKY GREENWELL
BLUES FOR DEMOCRACY
Independent

It feels that every time a US election comes around, someone produces a political LP, generally bemoaning the corruption and fascism of the US Government. This is one of those, but it benefits from being played and written by some of New Orleans best musicians. Smoky Greenwell is a noted harmonica player, and he is joined by keyboards player Johnny Neel (currently with the Allman Brothers) along with a stack of NO's best sessioneers. With titles such as Get Out And Vote, Liars, Cheaters And Losers and Slow Moving Coup it isn't difficult to see Greenwell's direction of travel. Greenwell has, throughout a long and award-winning career, has generally written songs with a pointed subject matter but this is his most overt. As he himself says: "When I write songs, I write with the intent of having something to say. I've written politically and socially focused songs in the past, but when I saw us slowly descending into authoritarianism it seemed natural to go in that direction with a bit more intensity." Now it helps that the playing on the album is excellent Greenwell is a superb harp player and Neel's keyboards add great texture to the music. The musicians that accompany the two are no slouches, the likes of Chris Anderson, John Conley, Dennis Gulley, Daryl Burgess, they have all accompanied some of the biggest names in New Orleans. The songwriting is ok, it makes for a springboard into some excellent playing, especially on the extended version of Common Ground included here. My only gripe is that the lyrics are a little too much to the point, no real subtlety. There is a fine version of Wilbert Harrison's Lets Work Together though. Greenwell has something to say and gets his point across, it's a decent listen and the subjects are pretty well universal at the moment.

ANDY SNIPPER

SUE DECKER
KEEPING TIME
Independent

There is something about Sue Decker's voice that strums a string deep in my heart. I grew up listening to the likes of Judy Collins, Laura Nyro and Bonnie Koloc, and Decker has a superb warm contralto that brings me to mind of those fine artists. She manages to convey emotion and tenderness as well as power and strength without strain or fuss. She also plays a mean slide guitar and writes songs that are way removed from the common drivel. Her music touches all the elements of Americana – some Blues, some country, a touch of soul and a teeny bit of western swing. Her songs have strong melodies and lyrics that tell of the human condition. She came to playing guitar late, playing her first chords at a bluegrass jam at the age of 35, but it doesn't show. The album, her second, was produced and mixed by Steve Dawson at The Henhouse Studio with Dawson also adding his guitar skills to the mix. They managed to attract some of Nashville's top session players, including Dave Jacques on bass and Justin Amaral on drums. The album was recorded live in the studio with the musicians bouncing ideas off each other in real time. And it shows there is spontaneity and the sense that each musician can make their own decisions. Fresh and alive, the songs get the treatment they deserve. Decker wrote 6 of the seven songs here, the exception being a collaboration with Brian Parsons, and they have relevance to modern living and society of the 21st Century, all in a form that will appeal to people whose roots go back to the 20th century. Standout tracks for me are The Lost Ones and Love Made For A Lifetime but everyone is worth listening to.

ANDY SNIPPER

JENNIFER PORTER
YES I DO
Cougar Moon Music

Nine albums into her career and to be honest I had never heard of Jennifer. However, on the strength of Yes I Do it will be highly likely that I will begin to listen to the previous releases. Ok, so what we have here again does not sit obviously, and cleanly, within the world of pure Blues. Here we have strong elements of Soul and Jazz as well as Blues and she has an immediately engaging vocal style. It would be unfair to try to compare like with like so trust me and just check her out and come to your own list of comparable talents. Six of the cuts are originals plus two covers and the variety is cracking. Jump Jive or Swing drives the opening cut Before We Call It Day. Punching horns and barrel house piano all add up to a fine sound. The pace slows next with the title track. Jennifer delivers the vocals with a sultry passion leaving you in no doubt as to her feelings. We slow even further with the Blues infused heartache of Over You.

> *a very good album, get it now*

As soon as All I Needed Was You begins I defy you not to be bopping around your flat as the accordion rhythms of CJ Chenier are transported to Louisiana. Just feel good music at its very best. Languid, hot and sultry describes Jennifer's version of Leroy Carr's How Long...really classy. The rather dubious lyrics behind Good Ol' Wagon, where the ageing husband is about to be replaced by a younger model, rounds out the album. A Bessie Smith piece it is set against a Second Line type tempo, which only adds to the feeling of impending transfer. This is a very good album, get it now.

GRAEME SCOTT

SHAKURA S'AIDA
HOLD ON TO LOVE
Massey Hall

Shakura S'Aida is a Canadian singer-songwriter with a vital, arresting stage presence as anyone who has caught a live set can testify. With many albums behind her, she returns this year with Hold On To Love, a twelve-track release that shimmers deliciously throughout. For my money, S'Aida is at her best when she just lets rip, her glorious soulful voice carrying everything before her. Indeed, there's nothing to dislike here, with every track rolling along beautifully drenched in soul and certainty. Delivered with an evident self-assuredness, Hold On To Love is an absolute delight, one of those all-too-rare pleasures that will have you reaching for a late-night glass or two of a silky malt whisky while tying to sit still as your body craves and tells you to get up there and dance a bit. It's just one of tose little pleasures that we can all do with these days - a bit of great music, with a gorgeous, soulful vocalist and a downright great album that is truly deserving of major exposure and support.

IAIN PATIENCE

VARIOUS ARTISTS

BLIND RACCOON AND NOLA BLUE COLLECTION VOLUME 6

BLUE HEART RECORDS

Fifteen songs, 15 artists, 15 very different sounds. This sampler is designed to highlight the work of Memphis-based music publicist Blind Raccoon and Pennsylvania's Blue Heart Records label. It's testimony to the diversity inherent in our favourite music that such a wide range of sounds that can all fairly be encompassed by the broad term 'blues'. Not everyone is going to like every track, obviously, but none are clunkers. This review doesn't have enough space to even list all contributors, but let me pick out a few of my favourites. The opener – Ballad of Pat Hare, from British blues scene stalwart Mississippi MacDonald - scores big by being built on an insistent guitar riff that got its hooks into my brain on first listen. Also catchy is Teresa James & The Rhythm Tramps I Do My Drinkin' on the Weekend, a brass-laden boogie celebration of Friday and Saturday night piss ups. And after a few bevvies, you'll no doubt be in the mood for the kind

> *this is one to check out*

of activity Kip London alludes to in My Baby Loves Me Like a Hurricane, which features some fine slide work. Tidal Wave by Anthony Geraci channels The Doors, especially Messrs Manzarek and Krieger, while veteran guitarist Anson Funderburgh guests with The Texas Horns on Never Buy My Soul. If you're open to hearing a wide cross section of indie blues in a short space of time, this is one to check out.

DAVID OSLER

THE DOUG DILLARD EXPEDITION

LIVE AT THE FREMONT HOTEL, LAS VEGAS 1970

Floating World

"Traditional Country" it says when you play this digitally, but that's not even half of the story. Alan Robinson's extensive, highly informative notes talk about "country rock", a term not heard at all often these days, but it is one of the roots of the present Americana boom, and this set most definitely falls under an Americana umbrella, though there is no rock influence here at all, and of course, this set was recorded in Sin City itself. Not that Doug was a stranger to some measure of big-time, his family bluegrass band The Dillard's appeared regularly on television on "The Andy Griffiths Show" in the 60s. The late Doug Dillard was a banjo player and singer who formed his Expedition band after the break-up of his collaboration with ex-Byrd Gene Clark, but the traditional influence shows most strongly here. There are numerous bluegrass staples present, mixtures of tradition, innovation, and huge musical skill, drawing from a wide number of sources. These are alongside bluesy items like Take A Whiff On Me, a rural rag in Bugle Call Rag, and a lovely cover of Cumberland Gap (remember Lonnie Donegan's version, anyone?) that might be from Woody Guthrie, several others here may also be from Woody too. Fiddler Byron Berline, who also worked with bluegrass king Bill Monroe excels throughout too, and the line-up is completed by Roger Bush on bass and vocals, and Arkansas-born Billy Ray Latham on guitar and vocals. Energy levels are high throughout on this extremely rootsy release, as you might expect. People used to talk about the deep well of American folk music, this exemplary set shows one way in which it was meant.

NORMAN DARWEN

THE FARGO RAILROAD CO.

TIME & GRACE

Independent

Time & Grace is the third album to be released from the band. The influences of this band are far-ranging, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Allman Brothers, Little Feat, Johnny Cash, Blackberry Smoke, and Bob Dylan. Now you may not think that these bands are that far apart, but each of the aforementioned bands and artists were themselves all coming from many different places, a mishmash of cultures and musical leanings. The album has a country vibe running right the way through it, with offshoots taking in, Rockabilly, Blues, and foot-tapping easy listening, or as some may describe it, Americana. The album kicks off with, Jackie Come On, The Eagles spring to mind, with their laid-back approach of fine lyrics and even finer music. Hard Work has a hard edge to it, more of a throaty growl to the vocals, and an up-tempo beat that ushers in the foot-tapping that stays with the album through many songs. Andy P Davison plays electric and acoustic as well as the harmonica, with Melvyn Duffy playing Pedal Steel guitar, and it's the harmonica playing that shines brightest on, One Mile, a tune that I'm sure is an audience participation favourite when these guys play live. Slipped And Fell is as country as country can be with the pedal steel guitar becoming the principal instrument. Don't get me wrong, this tune is not just some sugary attempt to appeal to cowboys, it is a fine tune with the appeal of Garth Brooks in his Stetson. Drinking Alone could be perceived as a honky-tonk song, or as a Blues song, the lyrics fit either genre perfectly, but what it does have is the ability to make you feel that you want to get up out of your chair and dance around not just succumb to tapping one's feet. All- in -all this is a feel-good album, with lots to like, whether you are relaxing in your chair, or you are driving in your car, it makes you feel happy.

STEPHEN HARRISON

THE GRIFFIN BROTHERS & MARGIE DAY

WEEPIN AND CRYIN' THE SINGLES COLLECTION

Acrobat Music

Edward Elijah Griffin, who came to be known as Buddy was born in 1919 in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, and his younger brother James Rudolph Griffin was born in 1921 in Norfolk, Virginia. They were both very talented musically, and their background enabled them to receive a top-class musical education at the Julliard school in New York City where Jimmy specialised in Trombone and Edward in Piano. Drawn towards the burgeoning blues and R&B market as WW11 drew to a close, they started playing around their local area forming a band with Wilbur Dyer on Alto Saxophone, Virgil Wilson on Tenor Saxophone, Jimmy Reeves on Bass and Emmett "Nab" Shields on Drums. Gradually building a reputation during the latter years of the 1940s, in 1950 they decided to broaden their appeal by hiring the female singer, Margie Day. This 52-track 2-cd collection comprises the A and B sides of their singles on the Dot label, including recordings with featured vocalists Margie Day and Tommy Brown, plus later releases by Buddy Griffin with Claudia Swann for Chess, and solo releases by Margie Day and Tommy Brown. This collection captures a strand of R&B at one of its most vibrant periods and is an entertaining showcase not only for two highly talented musicians, but also the circle of equally talented collaborators who shared their success. It includes their and Margie Day's US hits, with R&B No.1 Weepin' and Cryin' and their other top 10 R&B hits, Hoppin', Street Walkin' Daddy, Little Red Rooster and Tra-la-la, along with the Buddy Griffin and Claudia Swann hit I Wanna Hug Ya, Kiss Ya, Squeeze Ya. In addition, there are many original compositions like Blues All Alone, Slow And Mellow, The Teaser, and I Wanna Go Back, plus versions of R&B and blues classics like Tampa Red's Pretty Baby and the Chuck Willis hit My Story. Indicative of the sounds and culture of the early 50s, worth a listen

SHIRL

THE HANGING STARS

ON A GOLDEN SHORE

Loose Music

Let me start by saying that is by no means a Blues album. To be fair, it does not try to be, what it is, is a brilliant Americana album, and as we know, Blues and Americana are not worlds apart. So, to the album, eleven tracks, all originals, written by band members, so, a great way to start listening to the album. The opening track Let Me Dream Of You puts you immediately in a peaceful aura, enjoying the silky smooth vocals and lyrics, with the Pedal Steel guitar being the dominant instrument on this, and every tune on the album. There is something mystical and soothing about the Pedal Steel guitar, it is equally at home within the Blues, or Country music, hence, Americana being the bridge between the two genres. As I listen to the album I get reminded

of the Byrds and The Flying Burrito Brothers from the late sixties, that air of abandonment, peace, love, and tranquility. Golden Share sees every member of the band contributing to the writing of the song, it gives a communal feeling to the proceedings, and that's what the album, for me, is all about. It takes us back to when things were less complicated, and songs evolved through shared experiences. As I said at the outset, this is by no means a Blues album, it is an album that encapsulates the best of Blues and Country. I hope that these guys do not lose their identity in pursuit of something that the band is not. A peaceful easy feeling, know where I have I heard that before?

STEPHEN HARRISON

STRUGGLE BUGGY
KEEP IT CLEAN
Independent

Struggle Buggy are no newcomers to the UK blues feast. A rollicking, boisterous outfit, led by veteran UK bluesmen Lee Bates and Billy Newton, they have been making and leaving their indelible stamp on acoustic blues music across the UK scene for many years. Firm, fun festival favourites, Struggle Buggy are masters of slip-sliding blues with at times a wonderful humourous take on tradition and a breadth of knowledge about the music that is surely second-to-none. Hokum is a natural position alongside some sliding Delta fretwork that echoes and resonates in everything they seem to do. With north-east, award-winning DJ, Gary Granger now a regular part of the band, they have now delivered a new release, Keep It Clean, with their usual foot-stomping style and tongue-firmly-in-cheek delivery. Kazoos roar along in the background – let's face it, an either 'love-it or loathe-it' instrument generally - but here in this strident, enjoyable mix a positive boon and advantage. Kicking off with some band laughter before launching energetically into 4th Street Messaround, a track that sort-of sets the tone, for what's to follow, the album holds twelve tracks that include the likes of Walking Cane, a title trck with delta-slide echoes, the San Francisco Bay Blues sounding Crazy 'Bout A Woman, and simply rips and roars along to the closer, Wonderful Time, with a harmonica lead intro and grabbing jazzy chording, and a feeling that this title might well reflect the thinking behind the entire project. A bit of joy and enjoyable Hokum guaranteed with this fun offering.

IAIN PATIENCE

TIMO GROSS
BLACK DAWG BONE
Grand Cru Records

Timo Gross is a German based Rock/Blues artist who has already released twelve albums. This is my first exposure to his music but after hearing the first couple of tracks I must confess that I am totally blown away. This is tremendous Blues music that is dark and sinister in places but totally spellbinding. Timo is a versatile musician who, besides his strong English language vocals plays Guitar, Bass and Keyboards, leaving guest musicians to fulfil the Drum, Harmonica and Backing vocals. His prime function on this album though is delivering some crunchy lead guitar and hard-edged vocals in a style that blends elements of Dr John with Tom Waits. Other than the final track, a laid-back cover of the traditional song Swing Low Sweet Chariot all the other material is self-written and as previously mentioned the first three songs are particularly strong with the menacing Devils Class being the standout, full of crunching guitar and menacing vocals, aided by some sharp Harmonica from Geza Tenyi. As the album progresses through its ten tracks there is a subtle change in the song structures with a lighter feel to them, with the song Rock and Roll even having some studio manipulation on the backing vocals to create an echo effect. It is evident listening to this album that Timo has a strong affinity with the Blues, so much so that he has teamed up with guitarist Adax Dorsam in a side project playing Leadbelly songs, the duo named themselves Leadbelly Calls and released an album in 2020. This album Black Dawg Bone is a fine Blues album that highlights a musician in his prime and one I am sure will be receiving accolades for it.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

TOM MANSI & THE ICEBREAKERS
EYEBALL
Lunaria Records

This is the 4th album from this trio of musicians, and it is very good indeed. You know that you are going to enjoy an album when from the first couple of bars of the opening tune, it immediately grabs you, Eyeball did this to me, in no uncertain terms. Pushback Blues opens the album in a fine funky style, the Double Bass setting the groove, oh my, after a few seconds, I'm gripped. I must add that seven out of the eight tracks are written by Tom Mansi, and his vocals on the opening tune are sublime, as they are on every track. It's such a funky/bluesy album, full of swing and swagger. As well as funky bass running through the album, acoustic, electric, and slide guitar all have a huge part to play. I guess we could refer to these guys as a power trio, I know that term has been used a few times before, but I do think that it sums up this band perfectly. On the album you have Funk, Rock, Blues, and Blues/Rock, and the Blues/Rock elements on the album are, I think what makes this band so good. As we know, Blues/Rock is a huge force in the musical atmosphere, and Tom Mansi & The Icebreakers have slapped themselves right in the middle of it, with the ability to bob and weave around other bits and pieces and combine them all. The one exception to the rule on the album is, Thinking Of You On The Moon. As the title might suggest, this is a more delicate tune, but nonetheless, it's still a worthy adversary on the album. This is my first encounter with this band, and on this showing, it certainly will not be my last. I'd love to see them in a live setting, then I would be able to see how they translate to an audience. After listening to the album, I'm pretty sure they would take the roof off. Hopefully, I'll find out in the none-too-distant future.

STEPHEN HARRISON

TAYLOR McCALL
MELLOW WAR
Black Powder Soul Records/Thirty Tigers

This follow-up album to his '21 debut record, Black Powder Soul, documents McCall's growing maturity in his vocal identity and his quality of songwriting. They enable McCall to do his thing which is to reveal his wise beyond years tough and gentle vocal tones via this collection of emotionally moving Americana songs. Dedicated to his grandfather, whose gun toting, black shades wearing in Vietnam photo adorns its cover, McCall imagines these songs as letters to home that his grandad might have sent.

> ***wise beyond years tough and gentle vocal tones***

This homage begins with grandad McCall singing a gospel on Sinking Sand before grandson McCall takes over on the soul-searching title track. Rolling Stoned Again and Whiskey Costs Less are two standout durable tracks that McCall will carry with him in live sets for decades to come. His sparse acoustic guitar skills are further proof of his talents and is a perfect accompaniment to his singing. Only in his mid-twenties, it'll be interesting to hear how his voice develops with age. He has the ultimate role model to observe whilst currently touring with Rob Plant/Saving Grace. It's a heavenly combination as McCall continues to climb his stairway to future success.

PAUL DAVIES

UNITED BLUES & ROCK EXPLOSION
HANDS ON THE TABLE
Beyond Blue Connection

This is a new collaboration between old friends and musicians who have individually been around the Blues circuit for more years than they probably care to remember. On the album, there are two guys from the UK, George Glover and Pete " Sarge" Frampton. Two guys from Germany, Ray Frick, and Tom Diewock. Frederico Bozas, from the U.S.A, and last, but by no means least, Kreso " SonnyBoy" Oremus, from Croatia. So, you can see that there is a wide span of people coming together to perform on this album. They all stayed together and wrote together and recorded together for the whole album, quite a rare thing nowadays. Under the stewardship of Ben Schmidt, they produced thirteen original tunes to make this one of the finest albums I've heard in many a long time. Each member has contributed to the writing, and the songs that each member wrote, they take the lead vocals on that particular tune. I, for one, like that analogy, you get a different output, a more personal take on the song, and that's not a bad thing in these days of AI, whatever that may be. So, the album, the opening track, Change

In The Weather, immediately sets the tone for the album, Pete Frampton lays down some sweet guitar complementing the rest of the musicians so well, especially his long-time friend, and musical partner George Glover on Keyboards. There a very few albums that grab me by the throat from the first tune, this album is one such offering. The album contains a nod and a wink in equal measures to Blues, Jazz, and Blues/Rock, albeit the main ingredient is Blues at its finest. The Jazz vibe shines through brightly on Ray Frick's, Let Me Be The One You Love, Frick's vocals are dark and dusky, a great tool to have for Jazz. I can state with abject certainty, that there are no fillers on this album, each track is on the album by merit, each member bringing something to the musical table. Add to the various genres previously mentioned, a large slice of Boogie Woogie courtesy of guitar maestro, Pete Frampton, a shake-your-ass type of song, full of frivolity and fun. The title track, Hands On The Table, does remind me of the latter-day Climax Blues Band, I wonder why that is? No matter, it's well worthy of being the title track. I sincerely hope that this foray into making an album is not a one-off venture. These guys are too talented to leave it here, they should also be thinking about some live dates, that would be the icing on top of this very delectable cake. Do yourselves a favour, buy this album, now.

STEPHEN HARRISON

VOODOO RAMBLE

CD 1 CAN'T WRITE A POP SONG 2022

CD 2 HOME AGAIN 20323

Thoroughbred Music Records

A couple of albums from Voodoo Ramble featuring a heady mix of rock-blues, boogie, Southern-rock, funk and touches of soul and prog. Main man Boris Zamba hails from Croatia and writes most of the songs with some help from Pete Feenstra with lyrics. CD 1 opens with a great Allmans style rocker Born On The Road featuring Boris on slide guitar and vocals. Title track Can't Write A Pop Song (When You've Got The Blues) is a catchy, thumping, rocker and then a heavy riffing guitar intro the fierce burner Too Bad For Heaven, Too Good For Hell. The pace drops for Down Home with some nifty guitar pickin' giving the song a jaunty country feel and that is followed by the rock ballad I Know It's You. London Town has echoes of the Kinks and Clash but my favourite track on CD1 is a soul extravaganza Out Of This World featuring guest vocalist Ivana, cooing backing vocals and smooth horns. CD 2 opens with Waterfall a funky grooving number featuring cascading vocals, swirling organ, and chiming guitars. Baby I've Been Loving You is a blazing blues-rocker featuring sturdy vocals, heavy riffing guitars and driving drums and Bye Bye Baby is another thumping number with added wah-wah guitar licks. Classic rock lovers will enjoy these well written, varied albums, both excellently played and sung. Home is a big production rock-blues ballad in the style of Gary Moore featuring heartfelt vocals and soaring guitars. I Found The Blues tells of a long hard journey and Street Livin' reminded me of early Hendrix with the guitar work. Goin' Wild races to the finish with echoes of the twin guitars of Quo! The album closes with the groovy tale of Love featuring funky guitar, vamping organ, and honking horns.

DAVE DRURY

CHRIS BAD NEWS BARNES

BAD NEWS TRAVELS FAST

Gulf Coast Records

Bad News Barnes is always a delight, every album has an individual stamp and unique personality, something that's way too rare in the world of modern blues, where rock-induced takes seem to profilate these days. An absolute, undisputed master of tradition Hokum blues of the od-school tradition, Barnes has just signed to leading US blues label, Gulf Coast Records, and delivers this debut full to bursting with his usual flair and fervour. Produced by Grammy-winner, Tom Hambridge, Bad News Travels Fast features Barnes' powerful, full-throttle vocals backed by a sterling group of leading US blues musicians including Sugaray Rayford, Jimmy Hall and Walter Trout, and all held together by Barnes' own writing skills and skewed take on life, love and pretty much every base in between. With track titles like The Juice Ain't Worth the Squeeze, Bluesman Can't Cry and BluesBaller Baby, you get an instant taste of just what kind of frolicking fun might be found here. But though the humour is integral to the product, the music is always absolute top-dollar blues, with great,powerful writing, vocals and musical craftsmanship at the very core.

IAIN PATIENCE

THE BLUES MATTERS CROSSWORD

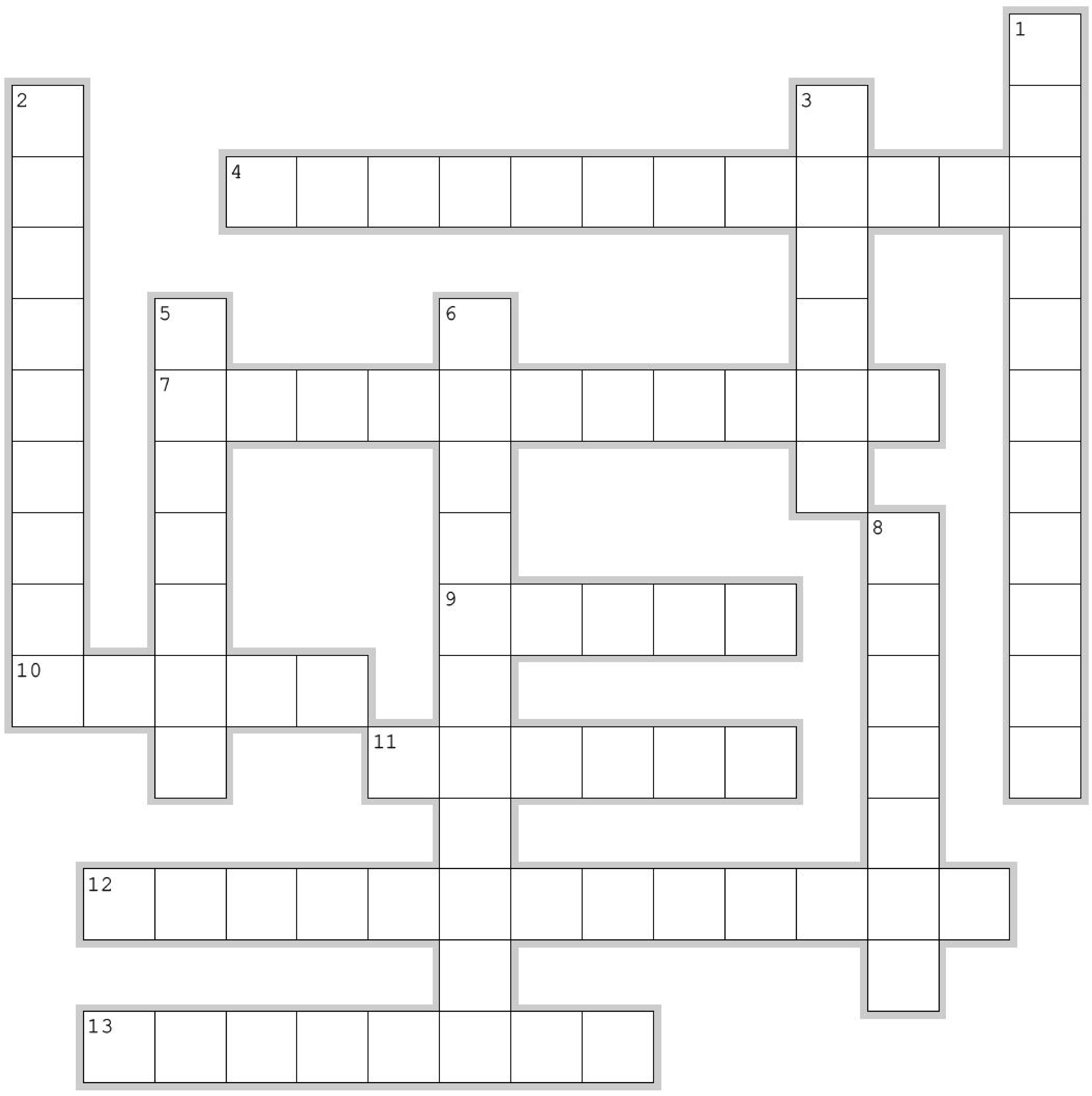
Can you solve this blues-based grid?

Across

4. What is the term for the repetitive musical pattern often played on the bass in blues music?
7. Who recorded "Born Under a Bad Sign" in 1967?
9. Name of the influential British blues-rock band formed in 1962, whose early lineup included Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce and more.
10. Which famous rock guitarist is releasing an album called Orgy Of the Damned?
11. Which British blues musician was known for his harmonica playing and songs like "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl"?
12. Which blues musician was known for his bottleneck slide guitar technique and song "Cross Road Blues"?
13. What is the name of the British blues guitarist and singer-songwriter known for his work with the band Savoy Brown and songs like "Train to Nowhere" and "I'm Tired"?

Down

1. Who was known as the "Empress of the Blues"?
2. British blues musician known for his harmonica playing and work with the band The Yardbirds, as well as his solo career?
3. Which blues musician was known as the "King of the Blues"?
5. Which blues guitarist and singer-songwriter was known as "The Texas Cannonball" and recorded "Pride and Joy"?
6. What is the name of the legendary blues guitarist who played with Cream and Yardbirds?
8. Who is the British blues guitarist known as "Slowhand"?
7. Which blues singer-songwriter was known for his gravelly voice and songs like "Hoochie Coochie Man"?
9. Which British blues musician was known for his harmonica playing and songs like "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl"



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POS	ARTIST	ALBUM
1	THE CINELLI BROTHERS	ALMOST EXACTLY…
2	TINSLEY ELLIS	NAKED TRUTH
3	JJ GREY & MOFRO	OLUSTEE
4	EVA CARBONI	IN THE NAME OF THE BLUES (E.P)
5	DANIELLE NICOLE	THE LOVE YOU BLEED
6	MISSISSIPPI MACDONALD	DO RIGHT, SAY RIGHT
7	KATIE HENRY	GET GOIN’
8	ALICE DI MICELE	INTERPRETATIONS VOL. 1
9	DAVE KELLY	SUN ON MY FACE
10	CHRIS WRAGG & GREG COPELAND	THE LAST SUNDOWN
11	KEVIN BURT	THANK YOU BROTHER BILL: A TRIBUTE TO BILL WITHERS
12	JACK J HUTCHINSON	BATTLES
13	BERNARD ALLISON	LUTHER’S BLUES
14	HILLBILLY VEGAS	THE GREAT SOUTHERN HUSTLE
15	CHRIS O’LEARY	THE HARD LINE
16	B’EE	WHAT’S IT GONNA B’EE
17	BRAD ‘GUITAR’ WILSON	BUCKLE UP!
18	SETH JAMES	LESSONS
19	MITCH RYDER	THE ROOF IS ON FIRE
20	GEMINIIDRAGON	3
21	BEX MARSHALL	FORTUNA
22	EMMA WILSON	MEMPHIS CALLING
23	ALEX VOYSEY	AV3
24	ADAM SWEET BAND	LIVE AT CRESCENT RECORDS (E.P.)
25	SUE FOLEY	ONE GUITAR WOMAN
26	RED RED	THE ALABAMA KID
27	FOG BLUES & BRASS BAND	TWELVE BAR PRESRIPTION
28	BLUE HEALERS	ASTRO BLUES EP
29	VOODOO WALTERS	HOW TO BE HAPPY
30	MIKE ZITO	LIFE IS HARD
31	PAUL REED SMITH	EIGHTLOCK LIONS ROARING IN QUICKSAND
32	MICHAEL MESSER & CHAZ JANKEL	MOSTLY WE DRIVE
33	BETH HART & JOE BONAMASSA	SEESAW
34	MARTIN MCNEILL	SWEET SOUL SLIDE
35	ALTERED FIVE BLUES BAND	TESTIFYIN’
36	DEEP SIX BLUES	THE DEVIL’S HAND
37	GARNETTA CROMWELL	TIME TO SHINE
38	BERNIE MARSDEN	WORKING MAN
39	LONG ROAD HOME	ARE WE INVISIBLE
40	THE MIGHTY HOWLERS	BACK ON TRACK

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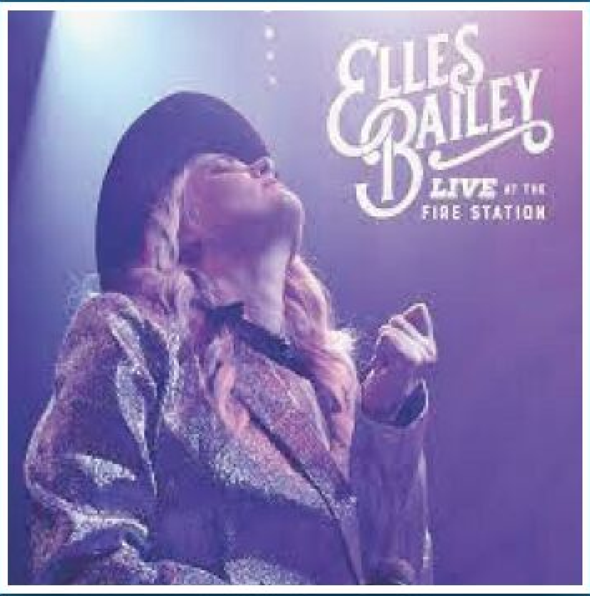
MARCH 2024



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LIVE AT THE FIRE STATION

THE CINELLI BROTHERS

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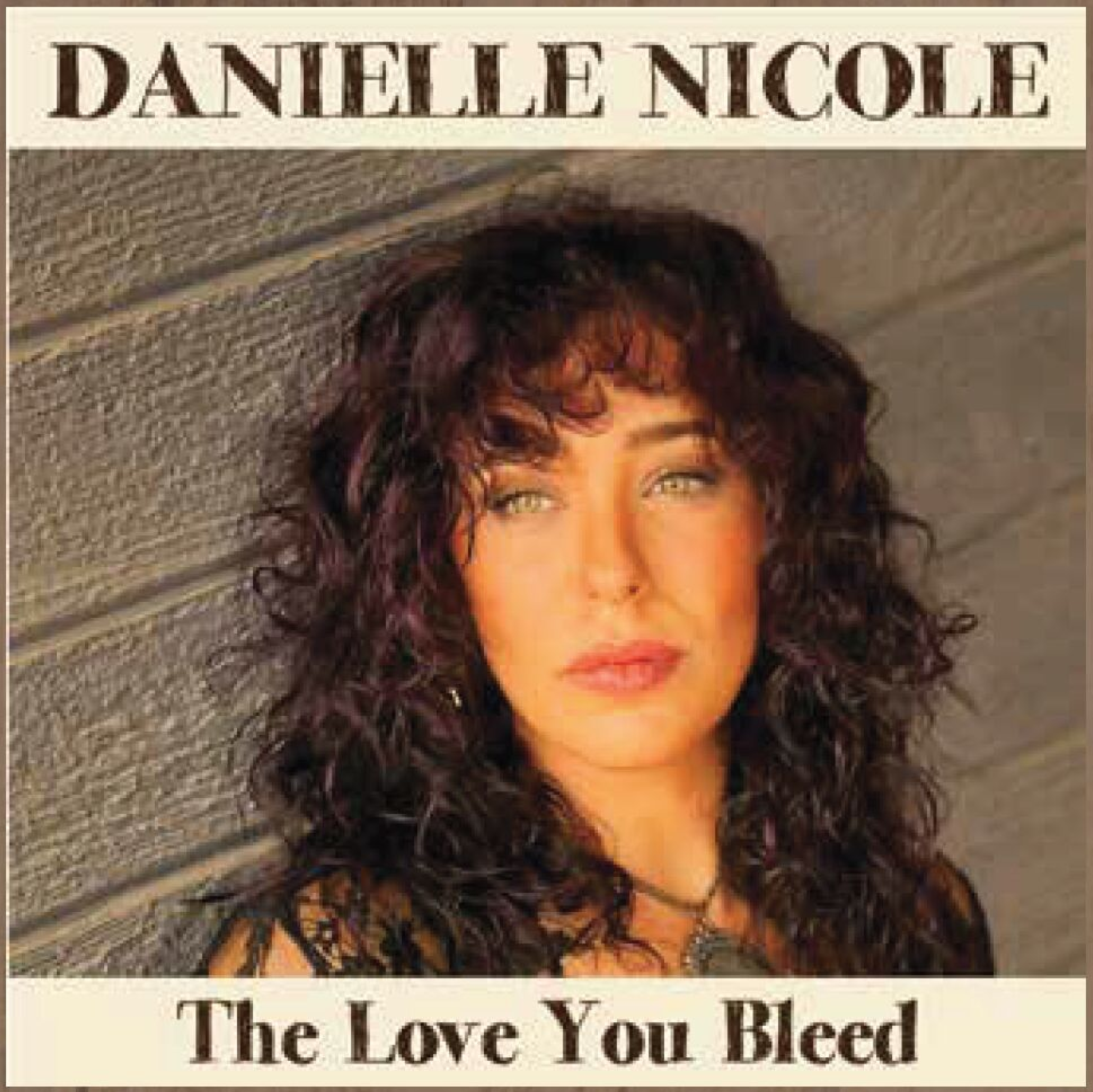

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